

**Alliance Party Response to**  
**Proposal for a Decommissioning Scheme Providing for the Destruction of Arms by**  
**Those in Possession of Them**  
**by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning**  
**(December 1997)**

1. The Alliance Party remains committed to the process of Decommissioning set out in the Report of the International Body (Mitchell Report - January 1996) and the Procedural Motion (24 September 1997). We restate our opinions tabled in our Submission to the International Body on Decommissioning (December 1995) and our submission on Decommissioning to the Multiparty Talks (October 1996).
2. We welcome this further proposal from the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning in as far as it goes. We respect the professional expertise of those who drafted it, and acknowledge that it provides a more detailed understanding of the modalities in which decommissioning can take place.
3. These proposals show that the Independent International Commission is well equipped to respond to any moves towards decommissioning on the part of those holding illegal arms. However we note that to date the Talks participants have not been informed that any actual acts of decommissioning have occurred or been proposed by those holding arms, or even that any direct contact has been made between the Commission and paramilitary groups. We have to conclude therefore that no real progress has been made on decommissioning.
4. Alliance has a firm desire that at least some decommissioning should take place in parallel with the Talks, in line with the compromise approach set out in para. 34 of the Mitchell Report. We recognise that the possession of illegal arms is in itself only a symptom of a wider problem of politically motivated violence. The fundamental significance of decommissioning is as a confidence building measure.
5. Decommissioning is an important measure which could help to build confidence that a ceasefire is genuine and will be lasting. Effective engagement in the decommissioning process, as well as an end to beatings and shootings by paramilitary groups would help to build the wider public's confidence in the process and in those group's commitment to the democratic process, and could help to make possible a change in approach to prisoners who are members of such organisations.
6. Confidence building measures should not be linked to political progress in the Talks. They are not just a demand of paramilitaries but a concern of the wider community. Confidence in these ceasefires is at a low level. Progress on decommissioning would give it a much needed boost.

12 January 1998