

**OPENING STATEMENT BY IRISH GOVERNMENT
REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE
ON DECOMMISSIONING**

Mr. Chairman,

The Irish Government welcomes the opportunity to participate in this - the first - meeting of the Liaison sub-Committee on Decommissioning.

We see the establishment of the Committee, together with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, and the launch of substantive negotiations as providing the best possible basis for taking forward work on decommissioning in accordance with the Report for the International Body.

As the joint statement issued by the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister on the 15th September makes clear, both governments see the resolution of the decommissioning issue as an indispensable part of the process of negotiation, alongside other confidence-building measures for all sides. Both Governments equally remain totally committed to the implementation of the Mitchell Report in all its aspects and look to all parties to work constructively and in good faith with them on this basis. This sub-committee provides a forum which will facilitate such an agreement. The success of our work will depend in large part on the constructive engagement of all parties in this sub-committee.

We - no less than the British Government - do not seek to underestimate the difficulties involved in securing that objective. Both Governments recognise that successful decommissioning will depend on the co-operation of the paramilitary organisations themselves and cannot, in practice, be imposed on them as a pre-

condition for successful negotiation or as an absolute obligation. Both Governments would equally like to see the decommissioning of some paramilitary arms during negotiations, as progress is made in political talks, and believe that this could be a major contribution to confidence-building and momentum towards agreement.

Much has been done to make that possible and the work of this sub-committee can contribute further to the achievement of that objective. A clear framework now exists as a result of the action of both Governments in enacting legislation on decommissioning - the Decommissioning Act 1997 in our case and the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997 in the case of the UK - and in signing and bringing into force the international agreement establishing the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning.

Regulations governing the operation of the Commission have also been made under our Act as has an order conferring the legal immunities and privileges the Commission will require to carry out its task. I am arranging for copies of the Act and the relevant regulations and orders to be made available to participants through your office, Mr. Chairman, today.

The Government have also formally appointed the Commission's three members in accordance with the terms of the agreement - General de Chastelain, Brigadier-General Tauno Nieminen and ambassador Donald C. Johnson. General de Chastelain will act as the Commission's chairperson. The members have already begun to discharge their mandate. I wish to acknowledge today our continuing gratitude to the Governments of Canada, Finland and the United States for facilitating us in making those appointments and for their continuing commitment to the wider process on which we are engaged.

Briefing have been provided by the Government and its security experts to the members of the Commission both before and following its formal establishment. I

expect that they will want to continue those contacts as their work develops.

That then is the background against which the work of this sub-Committee is taking place. The task which the sub-committee has been given is to assist as appropriate the implementation of all aspects of decommissioning as set out in the Report of the International Body. We have been asked, in particular, to:

- consider any legislative proposals by the Governments, and any proposed regulations;
- to consider the type of scheme or schemes for decommissioning and the role of the Independent International Commission in respect of those schemes; and
- to consider proposals for such schemes drawn up by the Independent International Commission and to submit any agreed opinion on the proposals for consideration by the Commission.

We look forward to progressing work on that mandate with the other participants in this sub-committee. We are confident that, in conjunction drawn the Independent Commission, we can collectively discharge that task successfully with the co-operation and assistance of the parties.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.