

24 February 1997

Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Dear

We have had a series of meetings with other parties on agenda item 2(c) which relates to the mechanisms for decommissioning. Discussion has focused on the relationship, if any, between the mechanisms for decommissioning and the talks process as a whole. Unfortunately there is, at the moment, little sign of us reaching agreement. In any event such agreement would only affect a small part of the whole decommissioning issue as the mechanisms for decommissioning will be separate from the talks and the other unresolved issue, namely the terms of entry for Sinn Fein is much more important.

You may recall that in a paper published in October 1996 we set out what we thought should be done at this stage of the talks. These were

- (a) the early nomination the International Verification Commission,
- (b) the enactment of the necessary enabling legislation,
- (c) the making of the decommissioning schemes,
- (d) agreement on the procedures to be followed if and when another paramilitary related party endeavours to enter the talks,
- (e) agreement on when the first actual mutual decommissioning should take place and how it should proceed thereafter,
- (f) creation of a committee of plenary to liaise with the verification Commission.

The first five items all involve action by Government. We are pleased to note that there has been progress on item (b) and the necessary legislation is well advanced in both jurisdictions.

Consequently we think that it is now time for the nomination of the Verification Commission. This would be a positive step forward and will show to the public that progress in resolving the problems with the talks is being made.

Sincerely