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THE NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM

DUP SUBMISSION ON DEVOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out the principles which in our view should underpin any form of devolution for Northern Ireland.

We believe that there is a widespread consensus that the case for devolution is a strong one. For too many years Northern Ireland has suffered from a lack of any real democratic accountability with decisions being taken over a wide range of functions by bodies or individuals who are neither elected by nor responsible to the people directly affected by those decisions. The recent decisions of the peoples of Scotland and Wales to seek strong devolved structures of government reinforce the glaring weaknesses in the current form of direct rule - a system made worse by the input given to a foreign government whilst locally elected representatives are excluded.

Devolution would, provided it is based on sound democratic principles, ensure effective democratic accountability, fill the political vacuum, strengthen people's confidence in the political process, provide for decisions to be taken at the most appropriate level and strengthen the Union.

THE WAY FORWARD

1. At all times devolved structures of government must be consistent with the integrity of the United Kingdom and any Northern Ireland Assembly would be subordinate to the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
2. Devolution must be truly democratic both in terms of elections to a new Assembly and in terms of how that Assembly operates and conducts its business.
3. There can be no question of an Assembly which is rigged so as to bring about predetermined decisions or which does not have the freedom to determine its own decisions in all matters within its mandate.

4. The DUP cannot accept that a Northern Ireland Assembly or any of its members should be tied in to, or forced to be in membership of, any form of cross border or all Ireland structures.

5. The modus operandi of the new structures must not be so cumbersome or unwieldy so as to place a stranglehold on effective decision making which is responsive to the needs of the community at large.

6. The structures of government should provide for the greatest possible amount of power to be devolved over the widest possible range of functions, including security. The people of N Ireland deserve no less than the people of Scotland. It should be our aim to seek the very best for all our people.

7. The DUP believes that it is important that there should be legislative as well as administrative devolution.

8. A new Assembly must be stable and durable whilst being capable of development in relation to powers and the range of functions.

9. The DUP is opposed to giving an artificial veto to any party above that given to it by the electorate. Furthermore we are opposed to the elevation into any positions of power of those who have demonstrated their willingness to support, and engage in, the use of terrorism to destroy democracy in Northern Ireland and who retain the organisational capacity for such violence.

10. We believe that the N Ireland Assembly must be capable of having a strong and vibrant relationship not only with the mother Parliament at Westminster but with the other Parliaments of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom. This must mean more than a mere talking shop.

11. Financial arrangements should be such as to permit elected representatives here the maximum amount of flexibility to determine their own spending priorities to reflect the needs of the community.

12. New arrangements will be needed to ensure that Northern Ireland is fully and properly represented at all appropriate levels, including at the Council of Ministers, within the decision making machine of the European Union.

13. The DUP favours a comprehensive Bill of Rights and Duties for the whole of the United Kingdom.

14. We reject any role for, or interference from, the Irish Republic in the setting up, working or general conduct of any Northern Ireland institutions of government.