



PRESS RELEASE - PRESS RELEASE - PRESS RELEASE

Commenting on Sinn Féin's refusal to support proposals for new shared institutions in the North, SDLP Negotiator Seán Farren said:

"We are either about a new beginning in our political relationships or we are about nothing. The new beginning suggested by the three-stranded agenda necessarily includes new institutions in the North as well as new North-South institutions. The latter cannot be created without the former. A North-South Council without new institutions in the North from which its northern membership will be drawn could not exist. By suggesting otherwise, Sinn Féin is being wither deliberately obstructive, or is failing to face reality.

"To argue that Unionists can never be allowed to share in political power is to reject the very goal set for us in the talks. To rake over misdeeds, abuses and injustices is to perpetuate grievances to the point where they inhibit agreement. Over the past three decades so much pain and hurt has been caused by groups from each side of the community on the other, that it is not difficult to produce arguments why we should continue to be suspicious and mistrustful of each other. We must learn the lessons of the past, but not become prisoners of the past. Our task is to agree principles and mechanisms which ensure that never again will the same abuses and injustices occur. The challenge is to build new political institutions together in which the powers remitted to them will be jointly administered. This requires involving each community's representatives on the basis of their mandate and in accordance with their electoral strength.

Sinn Féin's refusal to support new shared institutions in the north mirrors Unionists' refusal to support a North-South Council. Both positions amount to an abdication of the commitment which all parties accepted when they entered the talks to address constructively all aspects of our relationships.

ENDS
2/2/98

