

SENATOR MITCHELL: PRESS CONFERENCE AT LANCASTER HOUSE,
26 JANUARY 1998

Senator Mitchell On behalf of Prime Minister Holkeri and myself we hope very much that the negotiations on a serious and substantive basis can begin tomorrow and we look forward to active participation by all of the parties that will be present tomorrow. I will be glad now to take any questions. Yes?

Media On the face of it the departure of the UDP is the set-back to the process, could you outline what you understand now given this so called May deadline to be the timetable which you're working towards to reach that deadline and when precisely in May you see that deadlock beaten.

Senator Mitchell I think it's not possible to be anymore precise than May but I remain convinced that an agreement can be reached by then, or possibly even before then, once there is a clear determination on the part of all the participants to move to that final stage and I hope very much that that process will begin in earnest tomorrow.

Media Are you disappointedit must be very disappointing at this stage?

Senator Mitchell I was heartened by the statement which Mr McMichael and his colleagues made when they left expressing a strong commitment to the Talks process. Their strong commitment and opposition to violence and of course by the Governments' statement that if there is demonstrated an unequivocal ceasefire in word and deed over the coming weeks that the Governments would be pleased to consider the return by the UDP to these Talks, and I hope that does happen. They have been constructive contributors to this process prior to now and I look forward to their return assuming of course that the Governments' conditions are met.

Media Are you dismayed by today's events?

Senator Mitchell Dismayed, no, no. Obviously it would have been our preference that we were able to proceed directly to the serious and substantive discussions which were scheduled, but under the circumstances that was not possible and I think the Governments quite rightly acted in the belief that this matter had to be brought to a conclusion immediately. I believe all, or most, of the participants shared that view and so I think the handling of it was proper under the circumstances. What has dismayed me frankly is the increase in

violence, the rise of sectarian killings in Northern Ireland. I think the fundamental question that is now faced by the people of Northern Ireland is whether their future is going to be decided by a relatively small number of men committed to violence or whether it would be decided by the elected officials who are participating in these negotiations. That is a faithful choice and I think it will be decided over the next several weeks. I believe that the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland want it to be decided by these participants in these Talks and I hope very much that they will seize the opportunity and bring it to a swift and what I believe can be a positive conclusion. I don't think the future of Northern Ireland should be left to a relatively small number of gunmen who are committed to violence and who are acting in defiance of all democratic principles.