

David Andrews

As you know we have issued a joint as it were judgement based on the fact that the situation we face on the ground in Northern Ireland is very grave. Recent sectarian murders have caused deep outrage and anger in the nationalist community and it should be said amongst the unionist community too. Under the rules and having carefully considered all the relevant issues we came to the conclusion that the UDP could no longer participate in the negotiations. At the same time we made it clear that if over a period of weeks there was a complete and unqualified ceasefire established by word indeed the Governments would consider the possibility of the UDP rejoining the negotiations. We would welcome that prospect in such circumstances. We will keep the situation under the most careful review but let me emphasise this process depends on the total and absolute commitment to democratic and

peaceful means required by the Mitchell principles. I welcome Gary McMichael's public re-statement of his party's commitment to the peace process, what matters now, as I have already stated, are deeds and words on the ground. This whole process is dedicated to the idea that a comprehensive political settlement can once and for all eradicate all political violence from Northern Ireland. I look forward to resuming work tomorrow towards such a settlement. The two Governments will be presenting papers to stimulate the base in Strand Two and Strand Three and I expect these to be agreed very quickly over the very near number of hours and again I am grateful to the Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, for giving me this opportunity of this short intervention in the first instance. Thank you.

Secretary of State

Can I just add to David's comments very briefly, we along with the Irish Government decided today that the UDP was

no longer eligible to participate in the Talks. The UFF have themselves admitted responsibility for a series of appalling murders which have created such fear on the streets of Northern Ireland. The evidence before us was beyond doubt that the Mitchell principles of non-violence had clearly been breached. This wasn't an easy decision and before reaching it we were anxious to hear the views of all the Talks parties. There was widespread support for the view that the requirement for total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles is fundamental to this process. It was a particularly difficult decision, we have just reached the point where the parties are beginning to embark on detailed negotiations which will influence the future of all sections of the community in Northern Ireland. I believe that the general public in Northern Ireland will understand and support the decision we have taken. In withdrawing from the

negotiations the UDP have in my view taken the appropriate course of action. As David has outlined the two Governments will keep the situation under review and do not rule out the possibility of the UDP re-entering the Talks over a period of some weeks. If a complete unequivocal and unqualified cease-fire were demonstrated and established through word and deed. In their statement this afternoon the UDP said that although they were leaving the Talks they were not walking away from the political process. I think that's very important. I welcome the news that some of the other parties have indicated that they will stay in touch with the UDP. The past few weeks in Northern Ireland have led to great suffering. Families have been devastated in a way that we all hoped had been left behind us and my thoughts like other Ministers are with them today. Those of us who remain in the Talks however must now focus on the important business before us and that is

to make progress towards an agreement. There is a great deal of work to do and we must now get on with it.

Media

Seamus Mallon said some time ago that if any parties left this process they were in danger of collapse. Are the Talks now in more danger at this stage?

David Andrews

The answer very briefly is no the Talks are not in danger of collapse. As I said and as my colleague Mo has said we look forward to the prospect of the return of Gary McMichael and his colleagues to the Talks in due course and there is no prospects of the Talks, no prospects whatever of the Talks collapsing.

Secretary of State

What Seamus actually said was that anybody leaving the Talks destabilises it, we have all argued that it should be inclusive and anything that destabilises the process does not help, actions outside the Talks effect the actions within the Talks.

Media

Is there any minimum period of weeks and do you have any evidence to support Mr McMichael's claims that the cease-fire has actually held since last Friday irrespective of the killings this weekend?

Secretary of State

We don't have a minimum or maximum time period because it depends on what happens on the ground. What happens on the grounds and the words and deeds of the UDP. In response to your second question on events since last Friday, Adam Ingram, the Security Minister, spoke to the Chief Constable this morning and the evidence that is available up till now does not suggest any UFF or UDA involvement.

Media

At what point did you receive evidence from the Chief Constable that the UFF were responsible for three murders in the last month?

Secretary of State

I can't give you an actual date Martina but if anybody listening who is with me can because the

days fade into each other. What I can do is answer the question that I was asked earlier in relation to the Maze is that I didn't have evidence, conclusive evidence to suggest the UFF were involved with the murder on the 8th of Mr Trainer before entering the Maze. The 12th I'm being mouthed was when I found out.

Media

Can I also ask you did you cut off contact with the Minister was Ministerial contact cut off in relation to it?

David Andrews

No

Media

So the Secretary of State won't see the UDP?

Secretary of State

We haven't said categorically that we will cut off contact, we have kept our options open and then the question is are you going to talk to them in the next 12 hours, 24 hours obviously we will judge the situation on the ground by word and deed but we are not setting up a position where either us or

the officials to begin with
would talk.

David Andrews

Yes I think it's fair to say
that Ministers not immediately
will talk with the UDP in time
and as the Secretary of State
has said there will also be
contact at official level in
addition.

Media

Secretary of State minimise
indeed what has happened the
killings in Northern Ireland but
are you in the business of
protecting principles or lives
because haven't all the
principles or many of the
principles of this process
already been corrupted during
the process. Hasn't the
principle on the question of
decommissioning already been
corrupted and what makes you
think that by putting the UDP
outside this process which you
always deemed to be inclusive is
going to save a single life in
Northern Ireland?

Secretary of State

Can I say to you that your point
about decommissioning we have

made very clear, we have a decommissioning body set up working very well, they have already put two reports into us so to say that we are not taking that seriously is a misrepresentation of reality. We made it clear all along that the principles that we stick to in relation to Mitchell have to be upheld. They are fundamental to the process. If we hadn't have done that today you would have asked me a question the complete opposite. It's a choice between the two, it was competing moral principles, we've stuck to the basic principle but we believe left options open in some weeks ahead to change the situation if the conditions on the ground merit it. You can't have people murdered and ignore it. Do you want to add anything Liz?

Liz O'Donnell

Well I was just going to say that Governments as distinct from other parties in this particular process have a unique responsibility to defend the integrity of the process to

defend and vindicate the integrity of politics itself. Compromise is something which is frequently called for and required indeed in this process and we have had to compromise all along the way on various issues but there are some things that cannot be minimised which cannot be set aside and the notion, the UFF notion of a measured response in defence of the murder of innocent Catholics is quite simple unconscionable and could not be excepted in any civilised system of politics and the particular set of circumstances which we were presented with made it obligatory on the Government to be sure footed to take a decision to defend the legitimacy and the honour of these particular Talks and I believe we had no option but to take the step we took today.

Media

Gary McMichael said your hand was forced, was it?

Secretary of State

By who?

Media

By the party?

Secretary of State

By events I think would be my answer. The parties were very clear in their views. I hadn't stated a public position and I don't think David or Liz or Paul had. What we said at the weekend was it was a difficult decision between potentially contradicting morality the morality of the integrity of the Talks verses the integrity of trying to keep the process moving so that less lives were lost. That was the decision we had to make. We talked about it together but the position of the majority of the parties was very clear.

Media

Secretary of State Gary McMichael said that your decision, your instability may lead to more sectarian violence.

Paul Murphy

Well I don't think there is any particular evidence that that is likely to be the case. I understand that Mr McMichael said in this room not so very long ago that he will be going

back and arguing the case for non-violence ensuring that the cease-fire would continue. Well I don't think so I think that at the end of the day we have to look at the integrity of the process and also the feelings of all those people in Northern Ireland who want this process obviously to succeed but to succeed as a peace process and I think what has occurred today is evidence of the fact that we are aiming in that direction.

Media

Secretary of State do you think the expulsion rule would any way incite the LVF?

David Andrews

Well we would hope not we can't of course speak for the LVF all we can do is hope that the statement by the UFF means what it says that they have brought their terrible and dreadful campaign to a conclusion and that in time as I say that the UDP will return to the Talks process. I'd like to think that the UDP are not so much outside of the process that they will be in contact with the process and

as I have said that Ministers and officials if required, and if requested, will be available to them to discuss any problems they may have in regard to their ongoing absence from the process.

Media

If you are talking about a matter of weeks and your going to review the situation on the ground to get an unequivocal cease-fire from the UFF to allow the UDP to be readmitted your only talking about weeks it could be 6 weeks as with Sinn Fein when these thing started, if your deadline is still May you are talking about virtual exclusion of the UDP for the remainder of the Talks?

David Andrews

Well I think that is really good point. I think that the Talks themselves need an urgency, an injection of urgency, but as to how long the UDP will remain outside the Talks will be measured by as has been said by both myself and Mo Mowlam by words and deeds on the ground and that will be reflected.

Media

But you are excluding one section of loyalism from any political solution you come up with by May?

David Andrews

Yes but the point we're making is that we have said weeks we haven't said the number of weeks so we can't give it

Media

But there are only a couple of months left between now and May that is only 8 weeks, 9 weeks, 10 weeks?

David Andrews

Well as I say we'd like to think that the words and deeds of the UDP will be reflected on the ground and that the LVF and the UFF will continue with what they would describe as their cease-fire and it would be appropriate then to measure the time span as to when the UDP would return to the Talks.

Secretary of State

The quality of the cease-fire that is the point in word and deed.

Media

Secretary of State why did you wait 10 days after hearing from the Chief Constable and not do anything about the UDP's position in the Talks?

Secretary of State

Because after hearing from the Chief Constable I wanted to talk to the Irish talk to the parties because we have had as you know a fair bit of criticism before Christmas about deciding things unilaterally without full consultation. It wasn't possible over that period to do it easily so we waited till we talked, we got into the process. The question related to their participation in the Talks and so that to my mind was the relevant domain to address the question.