

STRAND ONE: CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE REVIEW PLENARY

This statement reports on the discussions we have had in Strand One of the talks since the start of substantive negotiations on 7 October.

The Strand One participants have taken part in a series of round-table meetings covering the whole agenda. With relatively few exceptions, parties submitted papers covering all items of the agenda, and where they did not they generally gave an account of their views in the meetings. In the last two weeks, we have had two rounds of intensive, and very productive, bilaterals. In the light of the first, I was able to circulate a paper setting out questions to give greater focus to the second round.

Overall, most delegations saw merit in aspects of the proposals formulated in 1992, as developed in the British Government's paper of 1995, *A Framework for Accountable Government*. Most, however, also had ideas about how that scheme could be improved.

There was a very large measure of agreement in favour of an elected institution in Northern Ireland, as part of a comprehensive settlement, the method of election to involve proportional representation in some form. There was wide agreement also that such new arrangements should involve the discharge of executive powers, with arrangements to ensure distribution of responsibilities to representatives of both main sections of the community. The extent of support for such arrangements to encompass legislative functions was less well defined, as was the range of functions to be covered, though many delegations believed it should be extensive.

There was a recognition of the need for checks and balances to ensure the protection of the interests of all sections of the community, though some differences about the form they should take. Some delegations saw merit in adopting elements of the sufficient consensus rule, as used in these talks, in this context. We heard a number of criticisms of the idea of a Panel, as proposed in 1992, though no clear view so far about how its place might be filled. More

attention will clearly need to be given to the rights and justice aspects of the agenda.

To sum up, there are a substantial number of new ideas in circulation in Strand One. I believe that is in principle healthy. Many of these ideas have not yet been subject to multilateral discussion, and it is difficult to know what agreement they would command. But in my view there are grounds for confidence, which I believe is shared by most participants, that in the context of a broader agreed settlement we would be able to reach agreement about Strand One issues.

Paul Murphy

2 December 1997