

6 July 1992

STRAND 2: OPENING STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF STATE

I enter Strand 2 as a participant rather than as Chairman. Yet it continues to be as important to me to facilitate agreement as to argue my own corner. Her Majesty's Government has obligations and responsibilities which are relevant to the Strand 2 discussions. But it has no blueprint of its own for Strand 2. A range of possible outcomes would be acceptable to it, but only provided they were also acceptable to the Talks participants taken together. What we want above all from the proceedings in the Talks as a whole is an outcome on which Talks participants can agree, and which in the final analysis will be acceptable to the people.

Of course, the United Kingdom Government has a view on what, in broad outline, such an outcome might look like. It would involve returning a significant measure of political power, authority and responsibility to locally accountable institutions in Northern Ireland. It would do so in a way which attracted widespread support across the community there. It would also do so within a wider framework of stable relationships. That framework would help to ensure that any new institutions in Northern Ireland would secure and retain widespread support. It would achieve the benefits of mutual understanding and close co-operation within the island of Ireland. And it would maintain and enhance the unique relationship between the United Kingdom and Irish Governments. But there are of course numerous ways in which an outcome consistent with such a vision might possibly take shape.

I mentioned that the United Kingdom Government would have continuing responsibilities and obligations in respect of Northern Ireland, as part of the United Kingdom, as to which I shall have something to say in a moment.

First, we shall need to ensure that whatever is agreed is in accord with our international obligations. We shall retain responsibility for the international relations of the United Kingdom, including responsibility for the representation of the interests of the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, and for the coherence of UK policy towards the EC. This is in no sense to pre-judge what arrangements are appropriate between Northern Ireland and the Republic. For example, it must make sense to optimise the benefits from the EC framework where the interests of the two parts of the

island of Ireland converge. The UK Government would not want to inhibit such co-operation, provided that anything agreed was consistent with the UK's role and responsibilities as a Member State.

We shall also want our close bilateral relations with the Irish Government to continue. We are committed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. But as joint

signatories to that Agreement, the two Governments have undertaken as part of the Talks process to be ready to consider a new and more broadly based agreement or structure if such an agreement can be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all the parties concerned. Whatever the outcome of the Talks, we shall certainly want to preserve and develop the special and friendly relationship between our two countries.

As Secretary of State, I envisage that I shall also continue to be responsible for bidding for resources for the transferred as well as the non-transferred aspects of the governance of Northern Ireland. There will be points in our discussion in Strand 2 where I have to have regard to that responsibility. Similarly, I will want to keep in mind the need to ensure that action taken in the non-transferred field is compatible with that in the transferred field and vice versa.

The meeting which you chaired on 19 June, Sir Ninian, was able to draw up a comprehensive agenda for Strand 2 which would enable the relevant issues to be systematically discussed and explored. [This agenda has now been agreed.] The UK Government will be very ready to facilitate the work of Strand 2 in whatever ways seem helpful; for example, we shall offer at appropriate points to table papers. I envisage that these might include discussion papers as well as position papers.

We have much work ahead of us. Just some of the issues which arise under our agenda headings include:

- be - how good and harmonious relations within the island of Ireland are to
 sustained and promoted
- how practical co-operation should be developed
- how far new relationships within the island of Ireland might help to
 resolve political tensions and difficulties within the Northern Ireland
 community
- share - how Strand 2 might affect common interests in relation to law
 enforcement, security co-operation and the objective which we all
 of defeating terrorism
- how Strand 2 might contribute towards an overall outcome from the
 Talks which gave expression to the identities of both main parts of the
 Northern Ireland community and would attract the widest possible
 degree of allegiance and support.

Both the Strand 2 agenda and the possible agenda for Strand 3 provide for discussion of constitutional issues. The contributions by the UK Government team to the meetings in London on 19 June, at which Irish Officials were present and on 30 June when Mr David Andrews, TD the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs was co-chairman with myself, both made reference to these issues.

We are concerned in Strand 2 with relationships within the island of Ireland. It is inescapable that constitutional issues have implications for these relationships - as they do for other topics which fall to be addressed in the Talks as a whole.

None of us can be in any doubt as to the strength and depth of the different views which are held on constitutional issues. Among other views represented around this table are those who are content with the present reality that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and those who have an aspiration to see a United Ireland. As my predecessor put it in a speech on 9th November 1990: "it is possible to take either position with integrity. It is acceptable to uphold the one or advocate the other by all legitimate peaceful and democratic means. What is not acceptable, and what totally lacks integrity, is the promotion of either view by the crude and brutal methods of violence and coercion."

If, despite these different viewpoints and aspirations, we could all reach clear agreement on the present constitutional realities and the circumstances in which they might change then the talks process is more likely to achieve a successful outcome commanding widespread support.

Her Majesty's Government believes that such agreement, taking account of the different viewpoints, is not in principle unattainable, however difficult it may be to achieve in practice. My predecessor's statement of 26 March 1991 made clear that it would be open to each of the participants in the Talks to raise any aspects of the relevant relationships including constitutional issues. The British Government, for its part, will seek as a product of the Talks process as a whole an unambiguously expressed consensus on the constitutional issues and a framework for relationships which will be genuinely acceptable to all.

We believe that such an outcome should thereby enable all participants to acknowledge Northern Ireland's present status as a part of the UK, and to recognize that there will be no change in that status without the consent of a majority of the people who live there, that the present wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland is for no change but that if, in the future, a majority of the people of Northern Ireland clearly wish for and formally consent to the establishment of a united Ireland, both Governments will introduce and support legislation to give effect to that wish.

Insofar as this is considered to have implications for articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution I have already welcomed the Taoiseach's public assurance that they are among the constitutional matters which the Irish Government envisages would be "on the conference table" during the Talks.

I have stressed the implications for relationships within the island of Ireland because they are what Strand 2 is all about, and because of their intrinsic importance. There are already many links, contacts and exchanges at all levels - to the benefit of both North and South. They involve, for instance, the exchange of information and experience, the co-ordinated development of the physical infrastructure, and co-operative action in the interest of better value or enhanced quality of life. The context of the European Community lends still greater salience to such co-operation.

Strand 2 enables talks participants to identify the extent of common interests, to consider where co-operation is fruitful and where it is not, to look at the scope for giving greater breadth and depth to the North/South relationships, and to consider possible institutional arrangements. Returning to a theme which I have already developed, the UK Government has no blueprint of its own for what conclusions should be reached. But we do regard this as one of the most important sets of issues to be considered in the Talks. We will be ready to facilitate discussion in whatever way we can.

It may be helpful, or indeed necessary, in our deliberations to make some assumption about the form institutions in Northern Ireland; might take. Perhaps I could repeat here what I said in Strand 1 about the Sub-Committee's report on possible institutional arrangements:

"HMG, for its part, would be willing to facilitate the implementation of the institutional arrangements outlined in the sub-Committee report of 10 June, including those aspects not at present universally agreed, if, but only if, they came in the light of further exchanges in the Talks, whether in Strand I or in other strands, to attract the support of all four parties.

As to the basis for entering Strand 2, I can say on behalf of the Government that unless and until the four parties agree on a different approach, we take the view that discussions in Strand 2 are likely to take place on the premise that any new political institutions in Northern Ireland would be based on the structures outlined in the sub-Committee report. The Government is ready to enter and participate in discussions in Strand 2 on that basis, not having at this stage a basis in any of the proposals in the form originally submitted by any of the parties in Strand 1 because none of those can be regarded as having sufficient general support."

The Talks on which we have embarked represent a real opportunity to construct a political accommodation from which all those who support constitutional political activity could gain. The road ahead is a difficult one. But we share a common purpose - the achievement of an outcome with which all with legitimate interests can identify and which all who love peace and justice within these islands can support. With your help, Sir Ninian, I hope we can advance towards that objective in Strand Two.

Note: For the purpose of this document, the term "participating Delegations" refers to the two Governments and the four Northern Ireland parties: Alliance, SDLP, UDUP, UUP