

STRAND THREE - A NEW AGREEMENT

A Consultation Paper by the British and Irish Governments

Principles and Requirements

1. In considering a new and more broadly-based Agreement, the British and Irish Governments will be seeking to develop and extend their co-operation, reflecting the totality of relationships between the two islands, with the objective of seeing peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement between all the people who inhabit the island of Ireland.

2. The Governments, who have already described a possible outcome in *A New Framework for Agreement*, would welcome the views of the parties on the principles and requirements which might inform and underpin any new Agreement. These might include:

- the principle of self-determination as set out in the Joint Declaration of 15 December 1993;
- the principle of consent in all its aspects: namely, that any change in the status of Northern Ireland should only come about with the consent of a majority of people there; that if a majority of people in Northern Ireland wished for a sovereign, united Ireland that would be given effect; that the consent of the governed is an essential ingredient for stability in any political arrangement; and that the aim of the negotiations is to achieve a new and lasting agreement which commands the consent of both unionists and nationalists;

- the principle that agreement must be pursued and established by exclusively democratic, peaceful means, without resort to violence or coercion;
- the principle that any new political arrangements must be based on full respect for, and the protection and expression of, the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland, and even-handedly afford both communities in Northern Ireland parity of esteem and treatment, including equality opportunity and advantage;
- the requirement that any comprehensive political settlement, of which a new Agreement will be a central part, must address all the relevant relationships, namely those within Northern Ireland, including the links between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; within the island of Ireland; and between the British and Irish Governments, including their links with any new institutions in Northern Ireland.
- the requirement to promote, support and underwrite the fair and effective operation of all elements of any comprehensive settlement agreed by the participants.

Constitutional Issues

3. Both Governments believe that any new Agreement will need to reflect a balanced accommodation of the differing views of the two main traditions on the constitutional issues in relation to the special position of Northern Ireland;
4. They have set out their own proposals on what this might comprise in paragraphs 14-21 of *A New Framework for Agreement*. They would welcome views on the approach contained in these paragraphs.

Nature, form and extent of new arrangements

5. The Governments envisage that new institutional arrangements would include a standing Intergovernmental Conference which would be supported by a Secretariat.

6. There are many other relevant issues, related to the above, on which views would be welcome, including:

- what should be the configuration, terms of reference and ambit of any such intergovernmental institutional arrangements;
- should such institutions concern only the two Governments' shared interests in Northern Ireland, or should they encompass also wider aspects of the relationship between the two countries;
- while in respect of Northern Ireland the two Governments would expect such institutional arrangements to be concerned with issues for which responsibility is not devolved to new institutions in Northern Ireland, what should be the role of such institutions in relation to devolved subjects; and
- should there continue to be an inter-parliamentary element, or elements, to the arrangements and, if so, how would the most fully representative participation be assured?

Relationship with other arrangements

7. The Governments would welcome the views of the parties on:

- what should the relationship be between the intergovernmental institutions and any new arrangements for the governance of Northern Ireland and for co-operation on the island of Ireland;

- should representatives of agreed political institutions in Northern Ireland be formally associated with these institutions and, if so, how;
- the implications for these institutions of the new arrangements for devolution in Great Britain; and
- in what way does the fact that the United Kingdom and Ireland are Member States of the European Union impact on these new institutions?

Rights and Safeguards

8. The Governments recognise that any new Agreement may need to reflect or incorporate a new framework establishing the comprehensive protection and guarantee of fundamental human rights.
9. Both Governments envisage that a new comprehensive settlement would be complemented and underpinned by an explicit undertaking in the Agreement on the part of each Government, equally, to ensure in its jurisdiction in the island of Ireland, in accordance with its constitutional arrangements, the systematic and effective protection of common specified civil, political, social and cultural rights. The Governments would welcome views from the parties on what rights should be so specified, and how they might best be further protected having regard to each Government's overall responsibilities, including its international obligations.
10. For its part, the British Government is committed to the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights.
11. The Governments have also indicated that they would encourage democratic representatives from both jurisdictions in Ireland to adopt a Charter or Covenant, which might reflect and endorse agreed measures for the protection of the fundamental rights of everyone living on the island of Ireland.

12. The Governments would be interested in the views of the parties on this suggestion, including on which rights might be specifically cited in any such Charter or Covenant.