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F Talks.

FROM: WILLIAM STEVENSON
Talks Secretariat
20 June 1996

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (L,B&DFP) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (L,B&DENI) - B
PS/Malcom Moss (L,DOE&DHSS) - B
PS/Baroness Denton (L,DED&DANI)-B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas (L&B) - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Leach (L&B) - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Currie - B
Mr Hill (L&B) - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Stephens - B
Ms Checksfield - B
Miss Harrison (L&B) - B
Ms Mapstone - B
Mr Whysall (L&B) - B
Ms Collins, Cab Office via IPL-B
Mr O'Mahony, TAU - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Mrs McNally (L&B) - B

MINISTER OF STATE'S MEETING WITH THE IRISH DELEGATION - 20 JUNE 1996

Summary

Irish now on board for the notion of developing the rules of procedure into a comprehensive free standing text and agreed to consider a draft. Sought reassurance that HMG would remain totally committed to the Ground Rules.

The Minister welcomed Mr O hUiginn, Mr Cooney, Mr Donoghue and Mr Kirwan to the meeting which began at 12.05 pm. Mr Leach and Mr Hill also attended.

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The Minister explained that he was undertaking a round of bilateral meetings with the parties and had just come from a long meeting with the Ulster Unionists. In discussion about the Ground Rules, the Ulster Unionists were concerned that if they signed up to the Ground Rules they would be constrained, eg by the reference to the Framework documents. The Minister said that this was not the case. He reported that the UUP were ready to consider an approach in which the rules of procedure were developed and the UUP were not formally asked to sign up to the Ground Rules.

Mr O hUiginn said that he had not spoken to his Ministers but his personal view was that the Ground Rules had statutory force.

The Minister stated that the Ground Rules document was a document of referral and not bound by statute.

Mr O hUiginn said that it would be necessary to develop a coherent set of guidelines that everyone could live with. He stated that both Governments were committed to the Ground Rules but that it may be possible to distinguish between the overall framework and the operational rules and procedures. Purely procedural points could be taken from the Ground Rules paper. Some wider issues such as participation was for the two Governments to decide.

Mr O hUiginn suggested that certain procedural problems could be remitted to the two Governments for resolution.

Mr Hill thought that this was a constructive comment. [It was certainly better than leaving Ground Rules as the basis for resolving procedural problems] The Minister agreed.

Mr O hUiginn noted that there could be problem if people "started to play games" and that there was a need to be clear about what type of issue could be referred to the two Governments. He also mentioned the question of venues but did not think it should be covered in the rules of procedure.

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The Minister reiterated Ulster Unionist fears that in signing up to a process they would be seen to agree to things which they didn't agree with, for example, the Framework Document. While this perception was inaccurate it was real.

Mr Hill said that Mr Maginnis had suggested that all participants should confirm that the outcome of any negotiations would not be constrained by the Ground Rules. Mr Maginnis had tabled a one sentence clause to this effect.

Mr O hUiginn stated that while all ground rules could be put into a procedure document this could take months to negotiate. It would be better to separate only those ground rules which related to procedure. The Irish would resist attempts to put other issues into a procedural paper.

The Minister said that the Ulster Unionist had concerns surrounding the Plenary Session. They wanted decommissioning to be discussed early in the agenda.

Mr O hUiginn was sceptical that this demand could be met and it would not find favour with the SDLP.

The Minister said that the idea of a September checkpoint was to give an assurance that the decommissioning issue would progress.

Mr O hUiginn stated that the need for common treatment on illegal weapons meant that the Ulster Unionists' position would fail.

Mr Hill said that the substantive issues would fall to be addressed when we got to that point in the opening plenary: the Ulster Unionists' immediate concern was the agenda for the opening Plenary. The political/presentational problem of giving Paisley an opportunity to grandstand without having moved decommissioning up the agenda was a real one.

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Mr O hUiginn understood that Mr Trimble needed "a triumph" and that they would help if they could, but Mr Mallon had concerns about being seen to play to one audience only.

The Minister agreed, but emphasised that it was imperative to give Trimble some comfort, in the same way that the UK had to agree to measures which gave comfort to nationalists.

Mr O hUiginn said that while he would wish to help Trimble, within limits, a request to proceed with decommissioning without Sinn Fein is an absurdity.

Mr Hill said that such issues were for the Plenary to discuss and that it was therefore important to agree an agenda and rules of procedure so that this could happen.

The Minister said that he may need to discuss further with Trimble, but he will continue to take the line that the process is predicated against the Mitchell approach. Ulster Unionist opposition to this is unacceptable.

Mr Leach said that it was important to give the Chairman clearly defined rules of procedure. This was agreed by everyone. The meeting ended at 12.41 pm.

[Officials subsequently agreed a draft of an expanded set of rules of procedure, without any major difficulty.]

(Signed)

WILLIAM STEVENSON

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