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Meeting with Alliance
20 June 1996

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MR. P. TEAHON	
MR. S. DONLON	
MR. T. DALTON	

1. We had a bilateral yesterday afternoon with the Alliance Party (John Alderdice, Seamus Close and Steve McBride).
2. O hUiginn presented the proposal which he had put to other delegations.
3. Alderdice reacted positively. He observed that Trimble had dug a hole for himself and needed something in order to get out of it. While he could be helped with some adjustments to the language of the rules of procedure, there was no scope in relation to the ground-rules, which were a given and non-amendable. He was trying to alter the talks process away from its Frameworks orientation and back towards his own agenda. He would run out of sympathy if he pursued that. It would be impossible to appease Paisley anyway.

The suggested Irish approach was a recognition of reality. The only possible difficulty with it was that, insofar as any of the ground-rules were taken into the rules of procedure, Trimble would claim that the remainder had been dumped. Alderdice also suggested that, if points of conflict had to be referred too frequently to the two Governments, the Chairman's authority might be undermined. (He recalled that during the 1992 talks Paisley had resorted regularly to the tactic of seeking meetings with the Prime Minister above the head of the Secretary of State).

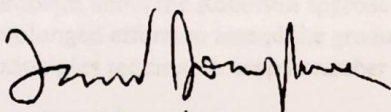
O hUiginn acknowledged the risks but emphasised that only the internal procedural aspects of the ground-rules would be put into the rules of procedure.

On the role of the two Governments, Alderdice recalled that the letter of invitation to the talks had issued from the two Governments, a point which the Unionists could not overlook. Close noted disapprovingly that, despite this joint invitation, it was the Attorney General who had been left with the entire task of defending the ground-rules on Wednesday. If the British Government was a weak partner in this respect, he wondered how they would behave if a point was sent back to the two Governments for resolution. O hUiginn emphasised the need for a clear advance understanding between the two Governments on this approach.

4. O hUiginn raised the agenda for the opening Plenary, and the position of decommissioning within it, on the lines of his presentation on this subject at the earlier meetings. He made clear, as he had done at all of the previous meetings, that it is the goal of the Irish Government to see the decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons. In practical terms, however, we saw no prospect of achieving this through the approach being pushed by the UUP. Repeating a further point made in the earlier discussions, he emphasised that the Irish Government would not be a party to any scenario which would lead to the exclusion of the Loyalist parties. It would be

grotesque if those who had maintained a ceasefire were to be placed at a disadvantage vis-a-vis those who had not. Did Alliance have any sense of whether Trimble would agree to get a sub-committee up and running alongside the strands?

Alderdice said that he had always favoured a parallel arrangement of this kind (which would facilitate the eventual participation of Sinn Féin). He suggested that the most which could be hoped for in the period between now and the Twelfth (when he expected holidays to intervene) was that there might be agreement on the rules of procedure and the agenda, that the Business Committee would be established and possibly that initial submissions would be received. O hUiginn agreed that we would be very lucky to have the opening Plenary concluded before the Twelfth. This would imply the absence of any significant hold-ups between now and then. Trimble, however, seemed so mesmerised by the quandary he was in over decommissioning that he was quite likely to opt for some delaying tactic.



David Donoghue
21 June 1996