

From: EDWARD OAKDEN

Date: 29 July 1996

PRIME MINISTER

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cc: Mr Holmes  
Mr Haslam  
Mrs Cleaver

*file*

NORTHERN IRELAND TALKS: UPDATE

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The NIO rang at 2200 to report on the all-party talks, which had finally just adjourned for the summer.

They made less progress today than we had hoped. The rules of procedure were agreed within an hour this morning. But the parties then got stuck on decommissioning for the rest of the day. So we still do not have an agreed agenda. Nor could the talks progress to the next stage, of opening statements in the plenary.

The proceedings eventually descended into farce, with Holkeri (chairing in Mitchell's absence) trying to adjourn proceedings at 2100, but failing to secure sufficient consensus. Until shortly before the close, both DUP and UUP were insisting on their readiness to work through the summer to resolve the decommissioning issue, and blaming the SDLP for being unwilling to go along with this. There was name-calling on both sides. In the end, Holkeri put the adjournment motion again, and only the DUP opposed.



The talks are now adjourned until 9 September. But they will then have to address straightaway the decommissioning issue, and try to agree an agenda; rather than, as we had hoped, continuing with opening statements, which would give an opportunity to regenerate some momentum.

Looking on the bright side, at least the process is still in being, and progress being made, albeit slowly. This is what Paddy Mayhew is emphasising publicly.

But between now and 9 September, we and indeed the Unionists and SDLP will need to do some hard thinking about how to deal with decommissioning, if we are not to run straight into that roadblock from the start.

(Edward).

**EDWARD OAKDEN**

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