

DRAFT

SINN FEIN

1. The British Government have received accounts of Sinn Fein's position about a renewed IRA ceasefire and entry to all-party negotiations.

2. From these accounts, the Government's understanding of Sinn Fein's position is as follows:

(i) Sinn Fein seeks certain assurances from the British Government.

These are:

- that the negotiations will be serious and comprehensive;
- that decommissioning will be tackled in parallel with the negotiations and will not dominate the agenda to the exclusion of other issues; and
- that the British Government will do all in its power to promote confidence-building during the talks.

(ii) If Sinn Fein were told in advance that the Government would give these assurances in public, then they would undertake (before such a public statement was made) that the IRA would respond to the statement by declaring a genuine and unequivocal ceasefire. Such a ceasefire would be for good this time.

- (iii) Once allowed to enter the negotiations following the establishment of such a ceasefire, Sinn Fein would affirm their total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles.

3. It is vital that there be no misunderstanding on these vital issues.

4. If the Government's understanding of Sinn Fein's position is correct, the assurances Sinn Fein seeks of the Government are consistent with the Government's public position and can be repeated, along the following lines:

- the negotiations which started on 10 June are to secure an overall political settlement and will address all the issues relevant to that. Any participant can raise any issue. No outcome is predetermined or excluded in advance. The Government cannot answer for any other participant but, for its part, along with that of the Irish Government, it is committed to ensure that a comprehensive agenda is addressed with a view to overcoming any obstacles which may arise. The Government is determined to see these negotiations through successfully, as speedily as possible;

23 July 1996

- the negotiations will also address the International Body's proposals on decommissioning. At that stage, the Government, along with the Irish Government, will be seeking the commitment of all participants to work constructively to implement all aspects of the International Body's report, including its proposals for some decommissioning during the negotiations. The Government wishes to make urgent progress in this area, so that the negotiations on political issues can proceed in parallel with decommissioning;

- we are committed to raising confidence through the Talks process. The International Body's report itself proposes a process of mutual confidence-building and we are committed to this as to all aspects of the report. Confidence-building is a two-way street. Against the background of the recent serious setback to confidence we hope that all parties will play their part in making it possible for future marches and parades to be handled without confrontation.

6. The British Government has also been told that Sinn Fein wants a meeting with British officials. (In line with the Irish Government, any Ministerial meeting with Sinn Fein could only follow an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.) If Sinn Fein believe a meeting with British officials for the purpose of confirming and explaining the position set out here is needed, the Government would be prepared to consider such a request in the light of all the circumstances including, crucially, events on the ground.

23 July 1996