

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

To: A/Sec Kirwan

From: Gerry Cribbin

Speaking Points
for hypothetical Press Conference following meeting between
Taoiseach and Sinn Féin Leader

I submit, for your consideration and views, a first draft of some Speaking Points and Answers to possible Questions which I have prepared, on a contingency basis, for the above possibility.

Obviously, it is very difficult at this stage to be precise on the wording that might be used. I believe, however, that any major gaps in, or substantive changes, to such a text should logically fall into place once the terms of an IRA ceasefire became clear and when the precise entry requirements for Sinn Féin's participation in the multi-party talks crystallise.

Gerry Cribbin

6 November 1996

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Press Conference following hypothetical meeting
between Taoiseach and Sinn Féin Leader

1. General Comments

The Government have already warmly welcomed the restoration by the IRA of its August 1994 ceasefire.

The restoration was the logical conclusion of an internal debate under way within the Republican movement for some time now.

There is, in my view, a solid acceptance now by the Republican movement that violence in pursuit of political aims is a self defeating and counterproductive way to proceed.

Equally, there is a firm recognition that the democratic and peaceful route is the only way forward that enjoys universal support throughout this island, North and South.

Inevitably and indeed understandably, some people are asking - particularly in the Unionist community: 'Why should we trust the Republican movement this time round? After all, the IRA broke its ceasefire in February last!'

The truth of the matter is that the answer boils down to a question of belief.

A belief that the Republicans want peace and agreement at least as much as Loyalists do. After all, it is those two communities that have suffered most from the violence in Northern Ireland.

A belief that Unionist and Loyalist agreement cannot be achieved through violence, just as Republican and Nationalist agreement cannot be secured in that way either.

As hard as it may be for some people to do so, we - in the interests of building peace and promoting reconciliation - must accept in trust the sincerity of the words in the IRA Statement. To do otherwise would be both morally wrong and profoundly undemocratic.

Constitutional politicians should never, and must never, rebuff those who, in our considered view, are genuinely abandoning violence in favour of exclusively peaceful and democratic means.

I believe that the Republican movement have now taken the decisive step to travel that road. If I did not truly believe that to be the case, I would not be here with the Leader of Sinn Féin on the steps of Government Buildings today.

2. The Way Ahead

In the Joint Communiqué of 28 February and in the Ground Rules Paper, the two Governments made clear that the unequivocal restoration of the IRA's August 1994 ceasefire was a fundamental requirement for the resumption of Ministerial dialogue with Sinn Féin and for that party's participation in negotiations on a settlement.

The language used in the IRA Statement convinces me and my Government colleagues that this time, the ceasefire is indeed unequivocal.

I believe that our judgement in that regard will be reinforced in the minds of others during the days and weeks ahead.

This meeting today is the first in a series that will lead directly to Sinn Féin's participation in the multi-party negotiations on xx xxxx.

I am glad that, at long last, the IRA has enabled a fully inclusive process of negotiation to be brought about. My Government have always believed that such a process of negotiation would be in the long term best interests of reaching an agreed settlement that would be capable of securing the allegiance and support of all shades of political opinion in Northern Ireland.

Sinn Féin, like all other parties, have now got the opportunity to represent their supporters and play their part in the shaping of a new agreed way forward.

As far as the Irish Government are concerned, our analysis of the situation remains as it always has been.

A durable peace strategy must be based on agreement, it must be based on consent, and it must be predicated on respect for the equal value and legitimacy of both the Nationalist and Unionist identities.

Again, the Irish Government's approach to realising the full potential of peace through the multi-party talks remains as it was prior to the IRA ceasefire restoration.

Our approach will continue to be informed and guided by the balanced set of principles and realities set out in the *Joint Declaration* which was agreed with the British Government on 15 December 1993.

We will use the proposals in the *Joint Framework Document*, again agreed with the British Government, as our signposts to give impetus, focus and direction to the multi-party talks.

And we will continue to use the *Report of the International Body* as means by which commitments to exclusively peaceful and democratic methods can be firmly established.

The *Report of the International Body* will also continue to inform our thinking on how the sensitive issue of decommissioning should be handled in negotiations.

It has been evident for some time now that substantive momentum needs to be injected into the multi-party talks while, at the same time, ensuring that no participant feels unduly pressurised. To that end, the Government will be pursuing the objective of a xx months timeframe for the talks [through agreement among the participants].

I believe that we are now on the steps of a whole new beginning for the peoples of these islands. The opportunity is now available to build a future of peaceful co-existence and agreement.

Despite the difficulties that undoubtedly will have to be faced and overcome, I am hopeful and confident that together - Unionists and Nationalists, Loyalists and Republicans, with the input of the two Governments - we can begin to write a new chapter on how we share this island together for the benefit of this generation and generations not yet born.

Hypothetical Question 1

Taoiseach, why are you so convinced that, this time, the IRA ceasefire will last? After all, the IRA said in its August 1994 that the ceasefire would 'hold in all circumstances' when clearly it did not!

Reply

I have always made clear that my Government would need to be convinced that a renewed ceasefire would not be a mere tactical device to secure Sinn Féin's entry into the multi-party negotiations.

I am on these steps with the Sinn Féin Leader today because I am convinced that the IRA ceasefire Statement is indeed unequivocal.

The IRA Statement goes further than the August 1994 Statement.

The Statement makes clear that '...' That demonstrates ...

It further states that '....' That amounts to ...

The IRA express '....' This a ...

These commitments convince me that the Republican movement as a whole are definitively abandoning violence in favour of exclusively peaceful and democratic means.

Furthermore, Sinn Féin, on entering the multi-party talks, will be required to sign up to the six Mitchell Principles on democracy and non violence. Commitment and adherence to these fundamental principles, in the words of the International Body, are essential 'to reach an agreed political settlement and to take the gun out of Irish politics'.

Hypothetical Question 2

Taoiseach, if the IRA continues to engage in targeting, punishment beatings and operations planning, would the Government in such a situation seek the immediate expulsion of Sinn Féin from the multi-party talks?

Reply

That is a matter that would be for ultimate determination by the independent Chair of the multi-party talks.

Having said that, however, actions such as targeting, punishment beatings and operations planning are profoundly wrong and would make it increasingly difficult for some other parties to be convinced that the Republican movement are indeed truly committed to the peaceful and democratic process.

Such actions would in effect undermine confidence in both communities with regard to the sincerity of the sentiments expressed in the IRA Statement.

I am sure, however, that the Republican movement themselves would be conscious of the political dangers involved in such actions.

Having said that, I believe that we should use the opportunity presented by the IRA ceasefire statement to look positively to the future - to work constructively to widen the space where hope can grow and reconciliation can be promoted through agreement.

Hypothetical Question 3

Taoiseach, if and when Sinn Féin enter the multi-party talks, it is likely that the Unionist parties will walk out. Is it really worth exchanging a Unionist and Nationalist multi-party talks process for a suspect IRA ceasefire?

Reply

First of all, I believe that the Unionist leaderships have the necessary courage and conviction in the validity of their own political positions to argue their points with anyone.

I believe also that the communities which they represent would not think it prudent or wise to abandon this hard won opportunity of fully inclusive negotiations on a settlement.

The multi-party talks will be continued irrespective of who, if anyone walks out. It has been made clear repeatedly that nobody can exert an unreasonable veto on progress.

The multi-party talks will move shortly into a proximity or bilateral mode.

I therefore can see no convincing reason why the Unionist parties should leave the negotiations. I do not believe that the people whom they represent would want them to do that.

It has been very clear for a long time now that the overwhelming majority of people on both sides of the divide in Northern Ireland want a future for themselves and their families where violence will have no place. We must never lose sight of that human dimension of peace.

The opportunity to build a new future is here and it is here now. I would urge everyone to grasp it and to hold firmly to it until an eventual agreed settlement is reached.

Hypothetical Question 4

Taoiseach, would you agree that the best way for the IRA to convince the Unionist community of their bona fides would be to commence now the decommissioning of their massive arsenals of weaponry?

Reply

The Mitchell Report offers the most realistic way to proceed with regard to the decommissioning of illegally arms and other weaponry. It is on the basis of that magnificent Report that the Government have based our approach to this issue in the multi-party talks and we will continue to do so.

In paragraph 34 of their Report, the International Body said: 'The parties should *consider* an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all-party negotiations, rather than before or after as the parties now urge. Such an approach represents a compromise'.

In paragraph 35, the Body said: 'As progress is made on political issues, even modest *mutual* steps on decommissioning could help create the atmosphere needed for further steps in a progressive pattern of mounting trust and confidence'. Therefore, all illegally held weapons - and not just those held by the IRA - are involved.

In any event, all these matters have been under active consideration for some time now by the participants in the multi-party talks and under the confidentiality rule, it would not be appropriate for me to elaborate too much on this issue.

I would add, however, that in paragraph 15, the International Body also said: 'A resolution of the decommissioning issue - or any other issue - will not be found if the parties resort to their vast inventories of historical recrimination. Or, as was put to [the Body] several times, what is really needed is the decommissioning of mind-sets in Northern Ireland'. I agree wholeheartedly with that view.

What we need to decommission as well are the notions:

- of victory or defeat on either side;
- that a gain on one side automatically implies something lost on the other side;

- that violence can ever be a meaningful substitute for the exclusively democratic pursuit of political aims;
- that compromise is an indicator of weakness rather than political maturity;

Hypothetical Question 5

Taoiseach, here you are on the steps of Government Buildings flanked by Gerry Adams just days after the IRA ceasefire restoration. Do you not accept that this sends a powerful signal to Unionists that the Irish Government are once again leading a pan nationalist front which at worst is hostile to the Unionist and Loyalist position?

Reply

Tags like 'pan nationalist front' or 'pan unionist front' are unhelpful to the cause of promoting trust and reconciliation between the two main identities on this island.

The truth of the matter is that this Government have worked very, very hard to outreach to the Unionist and Loyalist communities and to understand their concerns and fears.

It is also a truth - and a most important truth - that what unites the parties in this State is of no threat whatsoever to Unionists.

We subscribe to totally democratic and peaceful methods; we believe that agreement must be founded on the principle of consent; and we sincerely seek a settlement to which Nationalists and Unionists, Loyalists and Republicans could give their support and allegiance.

I am on the steps on Government Buildings with Gerry Adams today because my Government colleagues and I are convinced that, this time, the IRA ceasefire is indeed unequivocal.

I am here with Gerry Adams because the Irish and British Governments have always said publicly (including in the 28 February Joint Communiqué) that the resumption of Ministerial dialogue with Sinn Féin and that party's participation in negotiations on a settlement would be fundamentally contingent on an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.

In the carefully considered view of my Government, that requirement has now been met.