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Speaking Points for Press Conference following hypothetical
meeting between Taoiseach, SDLP and Sinn Féin Leaders
[and other Government Party Leaders]

I The Unequivocal Restoration of the August, 1994 Ceasefire

1. Welcome for ceasefire announcement

The Government have already warmly welcomed the restoration by the IRA of its August 1994 ceasefire [and particularly the terms of the announcement].

2. Benefits of Restored Ceasefire

The restoration of the IRA ceasefire

- responds to the heartfelt desire for peace of the people of Ireland, North and South, as shown by the tens of thousands who demonstrated for peace at the beginning of this year and allows ordinary people to look forward to living normal, happy lives and to a future for their children
- will again save many lives that might otherwise have been lost; the numbers saved could run into many thousands, because the ceasefire heads off the full-scale resumption of the IRA campaign which, in all probability would have provoked a counter-campaign by the Loyalist paramilitaries
- provides a space in which the healing process of reconciliation and of rebuilding trust and community relations can again be taken up in an atmosphere of peace and of hope
- releases the potential for the Northern Ireland economy to flourish and, with the right policies, for all the economic and social benefits studied by the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation to flow.

This outline of the benefits is far from exhaustive. In a nutshell, the restoration again offers a future of hope.

3. Tributes

I would like to begin by paying tribute to all those who have striven so long and so hard to bring about this restoration, particularly those who are with me today [Dick Spring, [Proinsias De Rossa], John Hume and Gerry Adams].

I also commend the many other people involved - in the leaderships of the SDLP and Sinn Féin; other Ministerial colleagues of mine; and officials of the relevant Departments here.

I also want to acknowledge the role played by Prime Minister Major. [as exemplified by his article published on xday last].

That article was the proximate occasion for the announcement of the ceasefire but, of course, it was also just the latest turn in his intensive involvement in the Northern Ireland issue. He and I have had an intensity of personal contact that must, I believe, be unprecedented among Heads of Government.

4. Restoration is logical conclusion of internal Republican debate and dialogue with others

The restoration was the logical conclusion of an internal debate that has been under way within the Republican movement for almost 10 years, that intensified prior to the August 1994 ceasefire and that gathered fresh momentum over recent months, [during which there has been a widespread process of consultation within that movement]. That internal debate has also, of course, been influenced by the Hume-Adams dialogue over a long period, including intensive discussions in recent months and by the wider process of interaction with other parties and viewpoints, most notably perhaps through the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.

I have long emphasised that, in my view, the logic of the Sinn Féin strategy for peace and for all-party talks, as set out by themselves, pointed to the restoration of the ceasefire, especially in the light of the commencement of talks on 10 June last. It is clear, from events since last February, that not all in the Republican movement necessarily saw the logic of the situation in the same way.

But we know that the process of serious rethinking and debate continued throughout that period and I am glad that its culmination and further dialogue involving John Hume, without the full support of the Government, have led to this hopeful new step in the transition from a politics that included the use of what was referred to as "armed struggle" to one that excludes resort to force or coercion.

5. Republican acceptance that use of force is counterproductive

There is, in my view, a solid acceptance now by the Republican movement that the use of force in pursuit of their 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.

6. Questions people ask about credibility of a restored ceasefire and basic answer - that it is a question of belief

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 previous ceasefire in February last! Where is the evidence that they won't do the same this time?

The truth of the matter is that the answer boils down to a question of belief, to an assessment that had to be made now, not in three months time or three years time but now.

It is inevitable that, after the ending of a previous ceasefire, there should be doubts as to whether we have indeed an unequivocal restoration or as to the value of a restoration of what was declared in August, 1994. I would not be honest if I said I was completely free from such doubts myself.

7. Government attitude - sufficient grounds to tip balance of risks towards accepting credibility

But I and my colleagues in Government are prepared to give the Republican movement the benefit of whatever doubt may exist. There is a risk that we could be wrong in that judgement. But there were risks whatever judgement we made. And very grave risks in a situation where a Republican movement which, after a difficult internal debate, had come down in favour of opting for exclusively peaceful and democratic means, were to be excluded from the multi-party process of negotiations. That way could lie, in a worst case scenario, the reversal of the choice that had been made, a return to violence, the breakdown of the Loyalist ceasefire and a descent into reciprocal slaughter and destruction on a scale even greater than before.

The Government must take risks for the enduring peace that is so ardently wished for by all Irish people and by people throughout these islands. We have sufficient grounds for belief that the restoration is indeed unequivocal as to strongly tip the balance of risks towards accepting the credibility of the IRA announcement.

I and the Tánaiste have repeatedly said over recent months that it was up to the Republican movement to convince the rest of us on this question of credibility, that each successive bombing made that task more difficult and that the terms of an announced ceasefire would be an important and decisive factor. Happily, the terms of that announcement are strongly persuasive in this regard. [Elaborate, as appropriate by reference to terms].

8. Factors supportive of Government attitude

The credibility of the ceasefire is also underpinned by objective factors. These include:

- the clear evidence, including from recent opinion polls, that Republican supporters want a lasting ceasefire and peace and a settlement that respects justice and is fair, as much as Loyalists do - not surprising since it is those two groupings that have suffered most from the violence in Northern Ireland;
- the fact that an inclusive and comprehensive process of negotiations, without preconditions, is now available in a form which has all the characteristics for which Sinn Féin called;
- the clear evolution of Republican positions over recent years, as a result of internal debate and in the face of the realities, increasingly acknowledged, that no military victory or defeat is available to any side; and that military campaigns can neither bring about a British Government withdrawal against the wishes of a majority in Northern Ireland nor win the support of such a majority, and, moreover, have served to alienate the people of the South and incline many to turn their back on the North. That evolution was seen in the deliberations of the Forum here in Dublin, even if there was not full agreement on political principles. It has also been seen in the fact that, however we may deplore the attacks that did take place and their consequences, the military campaign was not resumed on a full scale.
- the intensive work that Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and others within the Republican leadership have put in since February last to bring about the conditions in which there would be an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire.

9. Arguments against possible alternative attitudes

What was the alternative to the judgement I and my colleagues have made? There has been talk of a quarantine period, a time-lag during which credibility

would be tested. Whenever that was raised in recent weeks, I resisted the idea. I note that on 4 November, Mr. David Trimble said that looking at periods was misleading, that what was important was that there is genuine commitment to peaceful means in a democratic process and that the first way in which to show that is in the language by which you renounce violence and embrace peace.

I have repeatedly said that a new ceasefire must be for good and not merely a tactic. I say it again today. But I did not set down any test period. For what kind of period would you need to be absolutely and utterly sure that a restored ceasefire was not merely tactical? It would have to be measured in years rather than months. But then you would have a classic chicken and egg situation or, perhaps better described as a vicious circle. If Sinn Féin entry to talks were to be delayed until one was 100% sure that a ceasefire was enduring, one might never get such a ceasefire in the first place. That is unpalatable - it certainly is to me and to all who believe that violence was never, is never justified - but it is reality.

To take a line of total assurance would be to cut off one's nose to spite one's face. Better surely to take the risk for peace that is involved in the judgement we have made, in the belief and hope that it can help set off a virtuous circle and kick-start a process in which trust and confidence can be built up by degrees, certainly not without difficulty, but where an openness to dialogue and compromise can release a new dynamic.

10. Further arguments in favour of judgement made by Government

In this respect, I and my colleagues took particular note of the statements made to Vincent Brown by senior Belfast Republicans at the Conway Mill in Belfast on 30 October, that they would abide by the agreed outcome of any process of fully inclusive negotiations. [This, of course, has now, effectively, been stated by the IRA in their ceasefire announcement].

On 20 May last, Gerry Adams gave a qualified indication that Sinn Féin could sign up to the Mitchell Principles. He also said, on that occasion, that "in the context of all party talks, if the other parties sign up to those principles, Sinn Féin will make its commitment absolute". Since then, all the other parties have done so, in the context of the talks. [Today, Gerry Adams has reaffirmed that Sinn Féin will in, the talks process, as others have done, make its commitment absolute] [Today, when he speaks here after me, Gerry Adams will be reaffirming that Sinn Féin will, in the talks process, as others have done, make its commitment absolute].

As I have said many times, those principles are very far-reaching in their implications. They are not some empty formula. They clearly exclude any reversion to the option of violence at any time. They are unambiguous and exacting in the demands they make on those who sign up to them.

11. Government judgement, on balance, puts greater weight on positive than on negative factors; hopes for transformation of atmosphere

I have set out the positive indicators in regard to credibility. I, of course, acknowledge, that there have been significant negative pointers. But weighing up all the indicators, and, particularly, the underlying trends, my colleagues and I have concluded that the Republican movement has, decisively, taken the option for peace and inclusive negotiations.

There is a great deal of distrust - on all sides. We must now all work to overcome that distrust. It is my heartfelt hope that the unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire will be the first step that will lead to a change of atmosphere, so that we can recapture the sense of hope and of unlimited possibilities we all had two years ago.

II The Way Ahead

12. Sinn Féin to be invited into talks now

[Sinn Féin will now receive an invitation from Sir Patrick Mayhew to participate in the multi-party negotiations.] The first step will be for that Party, in the talks context, to make clear its total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the report of the International Body, that is the Mitchell Principles. [? Elaborate by reference to other elements of [agreed] scenario.]

13. Reasons for today's meeting

The reason why I am standing here on the steps of Government Buildings with John Hume and Gerry Adams is two-fold: first, to mark the very welcome restoration of the IRA ceasefire and the roles of Mr Hume and Mr Adams in bringing it about, and second, to signal to the Republican community in the clearest way possible that, now that we have a ceasefire, this Government is once again prepared to do business with its political leadership, on the basis that the ceasefire is credible and is maintained.

14. Meeting today does not represent or signal a pan-nationalist front hostile to unionist interests

This meeting does not represent the existence, or signal the reconstitution, of any pan-nationalist front aimed at undermining the legitimate interests of Unionists. As I said in the Dáil on 10 October, there is no pan-nationalist front, intent on pursuing a malign agenda to the detriment of Unionists. I said too that we, the people in the Republic, have no agenda of a progressive takeover of Northern Ireland against the wishes of a majority there. That is and will remain the position.

15. Benefits of fully inclusive process of negotiation

I am glad that, at long last, the IRA has done what was necessary, on their part, to enable a fully inclusive process of negotiation to be brought about. My Government have always believed that such a process of negotiation would give us the best chance 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 who, in the North, constitute up to 15% of the electorate, on the basis of the talks election - and play their part in the shaping of a new agreed way forward.

16. Analysis and approach of Irish Government unchanged

As far as the Irish Government are concerned, our analysis of the situation remains as it always has been. Our approach to realising the full potential of peace through the multi-party talks remain as it was prior to the IRA ceasefire restoration.

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.

17. Basis of Government's approach to negotiations - as per Finglas speech, to be based on agreed documents

I set out the Irish Government's approach to the negotiations in my speech at Finglas on 30 April last. I said then, and repeat now, that our position will be based on the "Realities, Principles and Requirements" document very largely agreed by the parties participating in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation and on the Joint Framework Document, agreed with the British Government.

We will use the proposals in that latter document as our signposts to give impetus, focus and direction to the talks.

Our approach will continue to be informed and guided by the balanced set of principles and realities set out in the widely supported Joint Declaration of 15 December 1993 and which were substantially taken up in the other documents I have mentioned.

The implementation of all aspects of the Mitchell Report will continue to be our bedrock as to how the decommissioning issue should be handled.

18. Intention to consult all parties in talks - aim an outcome agreed as between both Nationalists and Unionists

Summing up, our approach will certainly be vigorously to pursue the legitimate interests and concerns of nationalists but always in a fair balance with the equally legitimate rights of unionists. I said at Finglas on 30 April, that where - in the negotiations now underway - there is parallelism between the positions we take and those of other participants, we will be prepared to work side by side for the achievement of common purposes. That of course applies to the SDLP and Sinn Féin and we will be holding further meetings with these parties. But it also applies to all the parties involved in the talks, whether Nationalist or Unionist. At the end of the day, what we are seeking to develop - and what we must develop if we are to secure a settlement acceptable to all - is a common front, an agreed position - as between both Nationalists and Unionists.

19. Fresh opportunity that must be grasped by all

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 leadership and 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.

I believe that we could now be on the threshold of a whole new beginning for the people in Northern Ireland and in Ireland as a whole and in relations between all the peoples of these islands. The opportunity is now available to build a future of peaceful co-existence and agreement. If we fail to take it, the consequences could be calamitous.

Hypothetical Question 1

Taoiseach, why are you so convinced that, this time, the IRA ceasefire will last? After all, on the previous occasion, Martin McGuinness said that the ceasefire would 'hold in all circumstances' when clearly it did not! And you yourself have underlined how much Canary Wharf and subsequent atrocities affected the credibility of Republican pronouncements.

Reply

- I have always made clear that a renewed ceasefire could not be a mere tactical device to secure Sinn Féin's entry into the multi-party negotiations, that it had to be credible and enduring.
- I am on these steps with the Sinn Féin leader because, as I said in my opening statement, my colleagues and I in Government, after weighing up all the indicators, positive and negative, and, especially the underlying longer-term trends, have concluded that the Republican movement has, decisively, taken the option for peace and inclusive negotiations.
- [- The IRA Statement goes further that 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 persuade me that the Republican movement as a whole are turning their back on violence in favour of exclusively peaceful and democratic means, as the logical conclusion of an internal debate and of a dialogue with John Hume, all the Forum parties and others, a process of transformation that has been under way for most of 10 years now [culminating in a wide process of consultation within the Republican movement in recent months.]
- In my opening statement, I also referred to objective evidence supporting credibility
 - . the measured strong wishes of Sinn Féin supporters for peace
 - . the availability of a talks process with all the characteristics Republicans sought

- the evidence of recent decades that violence retards, not advances, the goals Republicans have
 - the work done by Republican leaders to bring about a restoration.
- There were risks, whatever judgement we made and grave risks if, when Republicans were opting for peace, they were given a rebuff. We have sufficient grounds to tip the balance of risks towards accepting the credibility of the IRA announcement.
 - Senior Republicans [and now the IRA] have said they would abide by the agreed outcome of any process of fully inclusive negotiations.
 - Sinn Féin are now prepared and ready to make absolute their commitment to the Mitchell Principles.
 - I am not completely free of doubts but for all the reasons given, the Government are prepared to give the Republican movement the benefit of whatever doubt may exist.
 - I urge all others to do the same, as the best basis for progress.
 - If I and my colleagues are wrong in our judgement and violence were to resume, the credibility of Republicans would be in tatters. This is the last ceasefire in respect of which the benefit of doubt will be given. Republicans know that. They know the choice is between inclusion now in democratic politics with an influence proportionate to their mandate or relegating themselves to the margins and exposing themselves to an unforgiving reaction from and on behalf of the Irish people.

Hypothetical Question 2

Taoiseach, if the IRA continue to engage in targeting, punishment beatings and weapon testing and preparation and, indeed, preparation generally for possible future operations would the Government in such a situation seek to immediate expulsion of Sinn Féin from the multi-party talks?

Reply

I and the Tánaiste have repeatedly said that this time a restored ceasefire cannot be a mere tactic, that it must be credible and enduring.

As I indicated in my opening statement, we have had to make a judgement now, as to the credibility of the ceasefire. We did not have the luxury of waiting to make that assessment later. There were risks no matter what judgement we made. But weighing up all the indicators, both positive and negative and, especially taking account of the underlying trends, we felt we had sufficient grounds for belief that the restoration is indeed unequivocal as to strongly tip the balance of risks towards accepting the credibility of the IRA statement.

But it is not a question of making a judgement once and for all. We will, of course, be keeping all aspects of the situation under close review. We will want to see an absence of actions that would be inconsistent with the credibility of a complete cessation of military operations.

There is a procedure available under the talks rules in cases where it is represented that a participant is no longer entitled to participate on the grounds that they have demonstrably dishonoured the Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence. That procedure ultimately involves a joint determination by the two Governments.

I do not propose to prejudge here today how the Government would react to any hypothetical set of circumstances but let me say this: a complete cessation of military operations had better mean that.

I will simply add that when there was a clear departure from such a cessation in February last, the Government parties and the other democratic parties participating in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation decided to suspend its meetings until there was a restoration of the basis on which it was established. That shows, I believe, that the Government will not fudge or shirk its duty on fundamental principles of democracy.

Having said that, I believe that all 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.

It is towards the particular difficulty which Unionist politicians will be confronting in Sinn Féin and in treating Sinn Féin

that we must talk and we must be prepared to develop trust if we are to achieve what everyone on these islands must surely want - lasting peace, stability and with it, increased prosperity.

After a huge amount of effort on all sides - including Sinn Féin - we now have an opportunity to negotiate such an outcome on a fully inclusive basis and against a background of peace. Clearly, a settlement that is negotiated between Nationalists, Unionists, Loyalists and Republicans has a much greater chance of sticking than a settlement negotiated on a more exclusive basis. And clearly, negotiations conducted against a background of peace have a much greater chance of succeeding than negotiations carried out against a back-drop of continuing violence.

I do not believe that the electorate would easily forgive any politician who walked away from the prospect of a lasting peace.

As I said in my Fingert speech last April, we want all the unionist parties at the talks and all the nationalist parties.

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

- I fully understand the particular difficulty which Unionist politicians will have in talking to Sinn Féin and in trusting Sinn Féin
- But we must talk and we must be prepared to develop trust if we are to achieve what everyone on these islands must surely want - lasting peace, stability and with it, increased prosperity.
- After a huge amount of effort on all sides - including Sinn Féin - we now have an opportunity to negotiate such an outcome on a fully inclusive basis and against a background of peace. Clearly, a settlement that is negotiated between Nationalists, Unionists, Loyalists and Republicans has a much greater chance of sticking than a settlement negotiated on a more exclusive basis. And clearly, negotiations conducted against a background of peace have a much greater chance of succeeding than negotiations carried out against a back-drop of continuing violence.
- I do not believe that the electorate would easily forgive any politician who walked away from the prospect of a lasting peace.
- As I said in my Finglas speech last April, we want all the unionist parties at the talks and all the nationalist parties.

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 excellent Report that the Government have based our approach to this issue in the multi-party talks and we will continue to do so.

The Government's position is, of course, that no person or organisation should hold weapons or explosives illegally. In line with that position, we shall continue vigorously the efforts of our security forces to locate, seize and thus decommission such arms.

In the same way, we want to see all paramilitary organisations voluntarily decommissioning such illegal arms as soon as possible. In the talks process now, when, with all the parties present, they come, in line with paragraph 34 of Mitchell, to consider an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the negotiations process, we will therefore be among the participants urging positive consideration of this approach.

But however much we may desire the earliest possible commencement of decommissioning, the Government have recognised that the Mitchell Report represents, as I have said, the realistic way forward on this issue. Essentially that report recognised that there are deep wells of suspicion and distrust relating both to this issue and to how serious or meaningful will the negotiating process be. The International Body set out the dual need for reassurance in paragraphs 30 and 31 of its report - both as to the commitment to peaceful and democratic means being genuine and irreversible, on the one hand, and as to meaningful negotiations to address the legitimate concerns of their traditions and the need for acceptable new political arrangements being on offer, on the other hand.

Thus, in the hard reality, progress on decommissioning will be related to progress on political issues in the negotiations. What we want is, as indicated in paragraph 35 of the Mitchell Report, a mutually reinforcing process of building confidence, step by step, within the whole process.

Pursuant to that aim, we will be seeking to advance progress in the negotiations so that they are seen as meeting the need for reassurance highlighted in paragraph 31 of the Mitchell report. The corollary would then be that, parallel to such progress, some decommissioning should be agreed, in order to meet the need for reassurance identified in paragraph 30 of the report. It is, of course, necessary to take account of the rule in the negotiations that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Ultimately, as the International Body said, what is needed is the decommissioning of mindsets.

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 of 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

- That is certainly not my intention.
- I said in the Dáil on 10 October that there is no pan-nationalist front, intent on pursuing a malign agenda to the detriment of Unionists. I said too that we, the people in the Republic, have no agenda of a progressive takeover of Northern Ireland, against the wishes of a majority there. That is and will remain the position.
- The reason why I am standing here on the steps of Government Buildings with John Hume and Gerry Adams is two-fold: first, to mark the very welcome restoration of the IRA ceasefire and the roles of Mr Hume and Mr Adams in bringing it about, and second, to signal to the Republican community in the clearest way possible that, now that we have a ceasefire, this Government is once again prepared to do business with its political leadership.
- I said at Finglas on 30 April, that where - in the negotiations now underway - there is parallelism between the positions we take and those of other participants, we will be prepared to work side by side for the achievement of common purposes. That of course applies to the SDLP and Sinn Féin and we will be holding further meetings with these parties. But it also applies to all the parties involved in the talks, whether Nationalist or Unionist. At the end of the day, what we are seeking to develop - and what we must develop if we are to secure a settlement acceptable to all - is a common front, an agreed position - as between both Nationalists and Unionists.
- The truth of the matter is that this Government have worked very, very hard to outreach to the Unionist and Loyalist parties and communities and to understand their concerns and fears. I believe this is acknowledged by a great many fair-minded people within the Unionist and Loyalist families.

Hypothetical Question 6

Taoiseach

Are you now going to shake hands with Gerry Adams?

Reply

On the basis of the assessment I have set out in my opening statement, yes, I am now going to shake hands with Gerry Adams. [He has done an immense amount of work, as have John Hume, my colleagues and others, to bring us to where we are today, of which I have given you my analysis.]

Hypothetical Question 7

Taoiseach, [what do you understand by the reference to consent in the IRA ceasefire announcement?] Do you consider they have come into line with other parties on the principle of consent, to which they refused to sign up in the Forum?

Reply

[The reference is question [is taken from] [very closely parallels] principle no 6 in the Final Document of the Forum's Drafting Committee which was fully accepted in the Committee by Sinn Féin.

Under the rules for the talks, any participant in the format in question will be free to raise any aspect of the three relationships, including constitutional issues and any other matter which it considers relevant. Participation in the negotiations is without prejudice to any participant's commitment to the achievement by exclusively peaceful means of its preferred options. Thus Sinn Féin are free to, and will no doubt wish to, enter the negotiations on the basis of their own positions, just as we in the Government will be basing our approach on our well-known positions as set out in the agreed documents I cited in my opening statement.

Thus, beyond what I said at the outset of this response, I would not wish to get into the business of interpreting the IRA statement.

Hypothetical Question 8

Taoiseach, last time the British stalled, erected preconditions and failed to grasp the opportunity that was there. What reasons do you have for thinking that they will do so this time and do serious business?

Reply

The British Government have made their position clear in Prime Minister Major's article. This article was the proximate occasion for the restoration of the IRA ceasefire. You can draw your own conclusions from that but it is quite clear that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is issuing an invitation to Sinn Féin to participate in the talks, initially to make absolute their commitment to the Mitchell Principles which Gerry Adams [is indicating] [has indicated] today they are ready to do, as soon as they get the opportunity at the talks process.

Apart from that, the crucial difference in the situation now, as compared with the autumn of 1994, is that a multi-party talks process is under way. That process has all the structural characteristics for which the Republican movement has called. Under the Ground Rules for the talks, the British Government have indicated their determination that the structure and process of the negotiations will be used in the most constructive possible manner in the search for agreement. They have said that they will use their influence in the appropriate strands to ensure that all items on the comprehensive agenda are fully addressed in the negotiating process. They have committed themselves to do so with a view to overcoming any obstacles which may arise.

The talks have been under way for six months now. The British Government delegation is present at the talks for three days every week. They and my Government are in intensive contact on the negotiations pretty well every day of every week. They are engaged.

Thus, as a result of the arrangements made by my Government with our British counterparts, the situation is quite different from what it was two years ago.