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FROM: JULIE MAPSTONE
IPL
6 JUNE 1996

OPENING PLENARY: DRAFT HMG OPENING STATEMENT

cc Mr Thomas - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Hill - B
Mr Beeton - B
Ms Checksfield

MR LEACH - B

Mrs McNally
olr

OPENING PLENARY: DRAFT HMG OPENING STATEMENT

I attach a further draft of the HMG statement for the opening plenary.

(SIGNED):

JULIE MAPSTONE
IPL

CT/TPU/1697

DRAFT

OPENING PLENARY: DRAFT HMG'S OPENING STATEMENT

1. The purpose of these negotiations is to seek a political settlement for Northern Ireland which commands the widest possible acceptability and which brings about political stability and an end to violence. This requires recognition on all sides of the different aspirations and cultural affiliations among the population of Northern Ireland. It also requires awareness of the unique set of relationships involved in Northern Ireland's political position as part of the United Kingdom, and geographical position within the island of Ireland.

2. Northern Ireland has a divided community, characterised by traditions and identities which extend beyond Northern Ireland itself to the rest of the island of Ireland and to the rest of the United Kingdom. Its pattern of allegiances however, is not clear cut. The larger part of the population of Northern Ireland retains a strong sense of loyalty to the Crown, believing that its culture and ethos can best be preserved if Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom. This does not necessarily preclude a sense of being specifically Northern Irish. The minority community, in general, identifies more with the rest of Ireland, and politically, many in that community aspire to the achievement of a sovereign,

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territorially united Ireland. However, a substantial minority are content that Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom.

3. For the last 25 years, all sections of the community in Northern Ireland have endured the deprivations that result from sustained violence. From the disruption of normal daily life and the damage to economic development, to the immense human suffering resulting from murder and maiming, the violence has affected everyone. Overwhelmingly, particularly in recent months, the people of Northern Ireland have rejected violence and demonstrated a strong desire for a spirit and a practical process of negotiation and compromise.

4. The Government acknowledges a responsibility to all the people of Northern Ireland to provide security, stability and good government. The Government is committed to the establishment of a society in which all may live in peace, free from discrimination and intolerance, and with the opportunity for members of all sections of the community to participate fully in the structures and processes of government on the basis of parity of esteem.

5. The Government recognises that Northern Ireland's various community, security and social and economic problems tend to reinforce each other in a way which makes their solution, both

individually and collectively, more difficult. Given this intimate and inseparable connection between Northern Ireland's political, security and economic and social problems, the Government recognises the need to tackle all these deep seated problems.

6. In pursuit of these goals, we have, in our policies in Northern Ireland:

- promoted the attainment of agreement amongst all the people who live in the island of Ireland, working together with

the Irish Government to that end; facilitate and enable agreement to take place, ensuring there is every opportunity for

- undertaken a co-ordinated and coherent approach to all aspects of Government policy in Northern Ireland, recognising that the fundamental political, security and economic and social problems of the region are closely interrelated and;

- pursued policies informed by the principles of equality of opportunity, equity of treatment and parity of esteem

irrespective of political, cultural or religious affiliation or gender.

7. Northern Ireland has suffered from an absence of agreement on political arrangements which would allow representatives from all main parts of the community to play a full and effective part in the

political life of the region. The Government's priority in Northern Ireland is to help achieve peace, stability, reconciliation and prosperity, and to establish locally accountable democratic institutions carrying widespread support and acceptance. Throughout the period of the talks process, our overriding aim has been to achieve a comprehensive negotiated settlement, recognizing that the path to this goal would be through political dialogue.

The Government's role

8. The Government's role is to encourage, facilitate and enable agreement to take place, ensuring there is every opportunity for reaching agreement whilst protecting those interests which are over-riding, notably HMG's international obligations. We will arrange for the holding of a referendum in Northern Ireland to ensure that any agreement at negotiations is endorsed by the people of Northern Ireland. And we will introduce the necessary legislation and administrative arrangements to give effect to an agreement.

9. All our work to date has been to provide the foundation of confidence for all-party negotiations to begin. The result has been the setting out of principles which provide the basis for the negotiations, and from which position progress can be made.

Principle of consent

10. The Government's approach to the future of Northern Ireland is based on the right of self-determination and the principle of democratic consent, as set out in the paragraph 4 of the Joint Declaration. The Government reaffirms all its commitments in that Declaration together with its obligations under international agreement and the guarantees which it has given, including Northern Ireland's statutory constitutional guarantee. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, in domestic and international law, and its citizens enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as all other UK citizens. The British Government is accordingly the lawful and democratically-constituted governing authority in Northern Ireland. There can be no change to the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. It is the present wish of a greater number of people in Northern Ireland for it to remain part of the United Kingdom.

11. Any settlement will need to be agreed by the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum, and by Parliament. This "triple lock" mechanism - agreement in negotiations, in a Northern Ireland referendum, and in Parliament - will ensure that any settlement receives full endorsement before being implemented.

Principles of democracy and non violence

12. The Government wholly rejects any attempt to promote political objectives by violence or the threat of violence. Terrorism has done great damage and inflicted immeasurable human suffering - although it has been steadfastly resisted by the people of Northern Ireland. More particularly, it has rendered the search for a just and lasting political settlement, as well as the achievement of economic prosperity, far more difficult, and it has also made necessary the substantial commitment of the armed forces in support of the police.

13. It is not possible for negotiations requiring trust and confidence to make progress under the threat of violence or where there is any hint of duress. It is necessary therefore that all participants in these talks commit themselves to exclusively peaceful methods and show that they abide by the democratic process. The election provided parties with a democratic mandate for entry to the talks, and the Mitchell report's six principles provided a focus for establishing the commitment to democracy and non-violence.

14. One of the clearest demonstrations of adherence to these principles will be the removal and disposal of illegally-held weapons and explosives. The Government accepted and endorsed the Mitchell report's proposed compromise on decommissioning as stated

paragraphs 34 and 35: some decommissioning during negotiations rather than before or after. The report also put forward guidelines on the modalities of decommissioning. The Government has consulted widely on the best means of implementing this recommendation. This session will be addressing this issue at the appropriate point on the agenda.

[15. The Government regrets the absence of Sinn Fein from these talks. As one of the parties which received a mandate at the recent elections, it is the responsibility of Sinn Fein to represent its voters' views at these talks. However, the fundamental democratic requirement of a commitment to non-violence demanded that there was an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire before Sinn Fein could take part. This fundamental pre-requisite was agreed between the two Governments and has formed our unaltered position since the joint communiqué of February 28. Unhappily, a ceasefire has not been forth-coming. The participants here however consist of representatives of 80-85% of the Northern Ireland voters together with the two Governments. Our task is to identify and reach consensus on behalf of all the people of Northern Ireland.]

Addressing all relationships

16. Any political agreement must address all the relevant relationships, not only those between the two main parts of the community within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new political institutions there and the Westminster

liament, but also those between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and between the United Kingdom and Irish Governments. Agreement cannot be reached in one part of the process in isolation from the other parts. This analysis is still relevant and it will inform the structure of these talks.

17. These three sets of relationships were addressed in Frameworks for the Future. This presented a view of arrangements, which might have the best chance of winning the widespread acceptance across the community.

18. The Joint Framework Document deals with relations in Strands 1 and 2, and the two Governments', views on the possible development of relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This is not a blueprint to be imposed by the two Governments, but a shared assessment to serve as a basis for discussion.

19. It remains the Government's belief that all the most fundamental issues facing Northern Ireland can be most satisfactorily addressed and resolved through inclusive political negotiations addressing a broad agenda across all the relevant relationships with no issue excluded and no outcome predetermined. The procedural rules for these talks will be agreed by the participants. No time limits have been set in order to avoid constraining debate and the burden of unrealistic deadlines. It

1 be open to the participants in the negotiating process to agree that certain issues should be formally referred to the forum to assist in developing agreement.

20. No one is being asked to give up their position of principle. But participants are asked to commit themselves to finding ways for the whole community to live and work together for the benefit of all. A settlement is needed for Northern Ireland which will embrace and accommodate cultural diversity, not iron it out or ignore it. The ultimate goal is a political accommodation built on consensus which will provide peace, political stability, restore the democratic deficit, and help to promote increasing prosperity.