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FROM: D J R HILL  
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM  
24 September 1996

PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) cc PS/PUS (B&L)  
PS/Secretary of State (B&L) Mr Leach (B)  
Mr Bell  
Mr Watkins  
Mr Wood (B&L)  
Mr Stephens (B&L)  
Mr Maccabe  
Mr Lavery 12.24/96  
Mr Perry  
Mr Whysall (B&L)  
Ms Mapstone

TALKS: SPEAKING NOTE ON OPENING PLENARY AGENDA

As discussed at this morning's briefing meeting I attach a revised draft of the remarks which the British delegation might make in support of the 30 July proposed agenda, if plenary does indeed move on to a consideration of this issue.

(Signed)

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DISCUSSION OF THE AGENDA FOR THE REST OF THE OPENING PLENARY

Draft Speaking Note

1. I am grateful for the opportunity to say something about the ground which needs to be covered in the rest of the opening plenary and how we might decide to go about it.
2. I should like to begin by making an important preliminary point. It does seem to me that there is clear need for us to make rapid substantive progress in these Talks. The people of Northern Ireland need a clear lead, a positive demonstration that constitutional political activity can lead towards a resolution of the causes of political instability in Northern Ireland. In the absence of any such demonstration, disenchantment with conventional politics could deepen. Tolerance for, or even support for and involvement in, non-constitutional action and the use or threat of violence could grow. None of us round this table is unaware of the dangers which that could bring.
3. We also need to take account of the approach of the UK general election. I quite understand that it will be difficult for party delegations to negotiate boldly and effectively in the immediate run up to an election.
4. On both grounds, therefore, we have a narrow window of opportunity before us. It will be in all our interests to make demonstrable progress in the next few weeks and the British Government is determined to facilitate and encourage such progress to the best of its ability. I suggest, Mr Chairman, that whatever happens we should hold a collective review of the situation in mid November with a view to assessing what progress has been made and what the prospects are for making further progress before the end of the year.

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5. We will be inviting the Business Committee to factor this proposal into its consideration of how the Talks timetable should be structured in the coming weeks.
6. As to the agenda for the rest of the opening plenary, it may be helpful to summarise the issues which the opening plenary must still deal with and identify those which, while desirable and appropriate, are nonetheless optional.
7. It is a requirement of the 28 February communique, following the Summit meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, that after securing participants' commitment to the International Body's principles of democracy and non-violence the opening plenary session of these Talks should address the International Body's proposals on decommissioning. The communique also made clear that at the same stage the participants should have reassurance that a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiation is genuinely being offered to address the legitimate concerns of their respective communities, and the need for new political arrangements with which all can identify. That latter requirement has already been demonstrated in part by the adoption of fair, balanced and comprehensive rules of procedure for these negotiations; it would be further demonstrated by agreement on a comprehensive agenda, as provided for in Rule 17 of our rules of procedure.
8. Those are the two substantive issues which this opening plenary has to deal with.
9. There had previously been a measure of agreement that any opening statements might sensibly be made as the first business after the summer recess and the draft agenda maintains that position. I do not feel at all strongly on this point. It could be helpful to provide a context and background for the substantive items on our agenda by giving delegations the opportunity to make introductory remarks

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setting out their positions on the key issues and their overall approach to the negotiations. I continue to see some advantage in that but it could be dispensed with it that were the general view. There will be plenty of further opportunities during the negotiations for each delegation to set out its position on all the issues which arise.

10. Other possible items on the agenda, such as the initiation of the three strands and the establishment of any mechanism which may be necessary to facilitate delegations' ongoing interest and involvement in achieving progress on decommissioning are purely procedural. I believe we are all agreed that you, Mr Chairman, should have an opportunity to make some concluding remarks before the plenary ends.
11. That is the background to the draft agenda tabled by the British and Irish Governments on 30 July.
12. Of the two substantive issues, there did seem to be a measure of agreement before the summer that the drawing up of the comprehensive agenda should not give rise to difficulty if it were confined to broad headings under which all participants could raise points of concern to them. I know there have already been productive bilateral exchanges on this issue, and I hope they could provide a foundation for early agreement around the table.
13. That leaves the address to the International Body's proposals on decommissioning. This is a significant and weighty issue on which views are likely to be both strongly held and some way apart. I hope we can get into the necessary discussion quickly so that we can develop greater mutual understanding on this key subject and work towards some agreed conclusions.
14. Against that general background I commend the draft agenda of 30 July, tabled by the two Governments, and look forward to hearing other delegations' comments and suggestions.

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