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PLENARY: 4 FEBRUARY

Possible opening statement by Independent Chairmen

1. When we last met in plenary, it was agreed to adjourn until today to allow further intensive bilateral contacts to take place among the participants.
2. The Chairmen are aware of a number of useful and valuable contacts which have taken place. We have ourselves had bilateral contacts with all the participants. I shall shortly invite each participant to offer its views on how, in the light of whatever bilateral contacts each has had, we may now best take the process forward.
3. But, before doing so, I should record that a number of participants have asked the Independent Chairmen to play a more active role in undertaking consultations with all the participants so as to take stock of the current situation and establish how best to take the process forward.
4. Subject to the views of the participants, the Independent Chairmen are very willing to undertake this role with a view to reporting back to the plenary - perhaps in a week's time, next Tuesday.
5. I record that proposal because it has been put to us by more than one party. I invite participants, in the course of their remarks, to comment upon it. But if there are other avenues of progress, we shall be very willing to explore those as well.
6. [The Independent Chairmen then invites each participant around the table in turn to comment, starting with the British and Irish Governments. The British Government will speak along the lines attached. As soon as each participant has spoken, the Independent Chairmen might then seek to put a specific proposition, as follows.]

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7. As I said in my introductory remarks, a number of participants have asked the Independent Chairmen to undertake a series of consultations with participants to establish how best we can take the process forward. The British Government has suggested that this should include whether there remains merit in exploring further avenues of progress on decommissioning, or whether it is best to give thought now to how we can most constructively use this period until the elections are over so as to create the best prospects for progress when the talks resume after the elections. The Independent Chairmen are willing to play this role, with the co-operation of the participants. I believe that [all/a broad consensus of participants] were content for the Chairmen to take this forward with a view to reporting to plenary next Tuesday. Unless there are any objections the plenary is therefore adjourned until noon on Tuesday.

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