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Annex AANSWERS TO HMG'S QUESTIONS

1. What assurance will there be that, if the IRA declare an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire, it will indeed be genuinely unequivocal, that is to say lasting and not simply a tactical device; and how would that assurance be reflected in words and deeds?

Sinn Fein is committed to work for an end to conflict regardless of the difficulties involved. Our peace strategy and our commitment to peaceful and democratic methods is the cornerstone of our party policy. We are committed to inclusive democratic negotiations. These will best be conducted in a wholly peaceful environment. In order to create this Sinn Fein is working for an end to all armed actions by all the groups involved. We can, with credibility, seek to persuade the IRA to restore the cessation of August 1994, when a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations is genuinely being offered. In our view this is the only effective way to proceed.

With this objective in mind Sinn Fein has identified, publicly and privately (Note 1), a number of key issues which need to be dealt with adequately and unambiguously, if we are to make a credible argument that an inclusive and meaningful process of negotiations is on offer.

The position of the two governments as outlined in the Joint Communique of 28 February 1996 is that Sinn Fein's "participation in negotiations requires the restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994". Sinn Fein believes that any restoration by the IRA of its cessation of August 1994 will be genuinely unequivocal, containing a clear and unambiguous commitment to enhance a genuine peace process.

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Sinn Fein has the democratic right to be involved in negotiations and to represent our electorate on the basis of our established electoral mandate. There should be no preconditions to dialogue and negotiations.

Note (1)

In correspondence to John Major, to John Hume accompanying the October 10 position, in the memo to John Hume in response to his suggested Questions and Answers on 30/1/97 and in the wording of the October 10 positions on the issues of:

1. Sinn Fein entry into dialogue.
2. Removal of preconditions.
3. Timeframe.
4. Confidence building measures.

2. When Sinn Fein join the negotiations they will need to make a total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell Principles. In view of the close association between Sinn Fein and the IRA, what assurances will there be that the IRA will not resort to violence to influence the course of negotiations or alter any aspect of the agreed outcome with which they disagree?

Sinn Fein have already publicly made clear our commitment to the Mitchell Principles and we will do so formally when we enter negotiations. Sinn Fein can only speak for ourselves and on behalf of our electorate. Sinn Fein is not the IRA. But we recognise and acknowledge the IRA's stated intention of enhancing the democratic peace process and the IRA's definitive commitment to its success.

It is self-evident that threats of any description from any quarter have no role to play in a process of democratic negotiations. We are wholly committed to democratic negotiations and to a democratic outcome of those negotiations.

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3. Is it the case that if Sinn Fein were to join the inclusive talks process, they would be ready to abide by all the agreed provisions and rules of procedure?

Yes. It is Sinn Fein's intention to exercise our democratic right to raise any issue of concern in the negotiations.

4. Do Sinn Fein understand that if they were to join the inclusive talks they would first of all have to commit themselves to the principles in paragraph 20 of the Mitchell report and that if, during the negotiations, they demonstrably dishonoured their commitment to those principles, they would no longer be entitled to participate in the negotiations?

Yes. Equality of treatment is an essential ingredient of any process of democratic negotiations. Sinn Fein wholly endorses an approach, where all parties are subject to the same rules and procedures in the negotiations.

5. Martin McGuinness said, in a statement of 14 November 1996, that the issue of arms should be dealt with to the satisfaction of all the participants in the process of negotiations. It seems to us that, for that to happen, the only likely area of agreement is around the compromise approach set out in paragraphs 34 and 35 of the Mitchell report and which the report asks all parties to consider. Is Sinn Fein prepared to endorse that compromise approach to decommissioning, under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all party negotiations?

The removal of the gun from the political equation in Ireland is a clear objective of a lasting peace settlement.

Given the importance of this objective the approach should be one which is most likely to succeed rather than one which blocks and disrupts the wider negotiations which are based on the

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principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. The issue of disarmament needs to be resolved but without blocking the negotiations.

Sinn Fein have already stated our willingness to address all aspects of the Report of the International Body in the context of our participation in inclusive negotiations.

Sinn Fein is prepared to consider any proposals which address the need to take all the guns out of Irish politics and we will be putting forward, for consideration, our proposals on this issue.

6. What contribution would Sinn Fein and the IRA expect to make to confidence building in the event of a restoration of the IRA ceasefire, bearing in mind the observations in Chapter VII of the Mitchell Report?

Sinn Fein will approach the negotiations on the sole basis of our democratic mandate. We are totally committed to peaceful and democratic means of resolving political problems.

Sinn Fein endorses the suggestions on confidence building made by the International Body in Chapter VII of their report. As the International Body remarked, there is a need for action by the British Government on prisoners, emergency legislation, policing and on social and economic issues.

In particular, issues of equality which are democratic or human rights matters do not require any negotiation. The British government could and should act on these issues immediately if they wish to demonstrate an interest in building confidence in their approach to the search for a lasting peace.

Sinn Fein believes that an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cessation would represent the most important confidence building initiative on the IRA's part.

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