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No. 4177 P. 5/11


TELEPHONE CALL FROM THE TAOISEACHSPEAKING NOTESPolitical talks

- disappointing that, ultimately, the parties were unable to resolve the decommissioning issue. Senator Mitchell and the other Chairmen did well to encourage an agreement but clearly, in the end, the parties felt unable to make the final move.
- nevertheless, we did well to play the process through February and into March and park it on an agreed basis. Dr Paisley used some colourful language during the final plenary but in the end we achieved a reasonably soft landing.
- encouraging that we got an agreed date for resuming on 3 June and that Mitchell, Holkeri and de Chastelain are all coming back. We would obviously have faced a period of considerable uncertainty if there had not been an agreed date to aim for.
- progress has been slow but we should not write off the process yet. It may be that the decommissioning nut will turn out to be too tough to crack, but we should not dismiss the possibility now. We will need to see the political geometry after the elections (general and local).
- noted your comments to the BIIPB on 3 March about the value of an agreed timeframe and calendar for negotiations. We are happy to encourage an agreed indicative time frame if that is what others want (28 November statement). If you have any further ideas like this we would be happy to explore them with you

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privately. Let us keep our eye on the talks ball and focus on opportunities for making real progress in June.

Consent/Sinn Fein

- I have noticed your recent comments about the need for unionist consent to any eventual agreement and your dismissal of the argument that the two Governments failed to respond to the IRA ceasefire. Both points needed making. Sinn Fein do not seem any closer to accepting the principle of consent; does it seem to you otherwise?

Hume/Adams

- we have been looking very closely at the list of questions Hume sent us from Adams. I am expecting that we will reply to him very soon; obviously we will keep you properly briefed. We do not have any particularly high hopes that this exercise will produce a new ceasefire - the IRA seem intent on continuing their campaign - but we are treating the questions very seriously, on the basis of stated policy. We will need to publish them soon after we give them to Hume; we will let you know when. No reason why Hume and Adams should not regard them as a serious response and I hope you will add your support to us and put pressure on Sinn Fein.