

29-AUG-1997 13:16

PRIV OFF STORMONT

01232 760481 P.01

*Opening Statement as delivered**L'0 ju 4/9**Top JH  
✓ c P's/r  
Press  
COS***SECRETARY OF STATE'S PRESS CONFERENCE ON CEASEFIRE DECISION, CASTLE BUILDINGS -  
FRIDAY 29 AUGUST 1997**

We have always made it clear that what we want to see is fully inclusive talks. Equally all the parties must be around the table on the same basis - sharing a commitment to exclusively peaceful means and the democratic process.

In particular, in Sinn Fein's case, this requires an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. These are the requirements for entry into negotiations - agreed with the Irish Government and set in statute by the last Government.

We have always made it clear that we would need some time - some 6 weeks - to assess the ceasefire and would look for consistency in word and deed.

Since the IRA ceasefire on July 20th, I have been carefully considering the evidence of word and deed. I have reviewed the position on the ground along with the Chief Constable, the GOC and my other security advisers. I have had a meeting myself with Sinn Fein. I have also consulted the Irish Government and heard the assessment of their security advisers.

We have always stressed that the evidence of events on the ground is crucial. For obvious reasons I do not intend to go into all the details of the information which I receive on these matters. However, I am satisfied that there has been a cessation of IRA attacks. Moreover, there has been no evidence of active targeting of paramilitary assaults which can be directly attributed to the IRA.

I have assessed carefully all the information relevant to whether requirements set out in statute have been met. I have decided that Sinn Fein meet these requirements. So I have written today to invite Sinn Fein to nominate its negotiating team. Sinn Fein will as a result formally enter the talks on 9 September. Like all other parties, they will then need to make clear their total and absolute commitment to the six Mitchell Principles of democracy and non-violence.

These fundamental principles bind all the parties in the negotiations and they are:

- to democratic and exclusively peaceful means;
- to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations verified by an independent commission;



- to renounce for themselves and oppose any efforts by others to use or threaten force to influence the negotiations;
- to abide by any agreement reached in the negotiations and to use exclusively peaceful methods in seeking to alter them; and finally
- to take effective steps to prevent punishment beatings.

We will continue to monitor events on the ground. We will look at the actions of republicans and loyalist paramilitaries on the same basis. If any party demonstrably dishonours its commitment to the Mitchell Principles, they cease to be eligible to participate in the negotiations.

The Prime Minister said in Belfast back in May: "I am convinced that the time is right finally to put the past behind us and meet the deep thirst of the people in Northern Ireland for peace, normality and prosperity".

The substantive negotiations which will start on 15 September offer the way forward. They can take place on a fully inclusive basis and in a peaceful environment. The International Commission on Decommissioning will be fully operational alongside the negotiations on the 15th September.

There are difficult and deep issues yet to resolve. Trust and confidence needs building on all sides. We as a Government have made it absolutely clear that consent is a prime consideration for this Government. I have said it, the Prime Minister has said it. The triple lock guarantees it. At the time the requirement for any agreement to command the support of both Unionists and Nationalists means that any outcome to the talks will be one that can be accepted across the community in Northern Ireland.

Everyone wants lasting peace. The people of Northern Ireland have had a taste of it over the last 6 weeks. The change in atmosphere is clear. The loyalists have played an important part. We must now build on what we have.

We are determined that substantive political dialogue will start on the 15th of September. People in Northern Ireland want their representatives to engage in presenting their views in these negotiations.