

NORTHERN IRELAND

The two Governments believe that it may be helpful to clarify their views on two crucial issues, consent and decommissioning, in the run-up to the proposed resumption of all-party talks.

Consent is one of the fundamental principles set out in the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993, which received broad cross-party support at the time. The two Governments remain fully committed to these principles, which will continue to determine their own approach to the negotiations on a political settlement due to begin on 15 September. They recognise the key importance of the consent principle, under which there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland other than with the consent of a majority of the people, and believe it should be a guiding principle through the negotiations, from which no outcome is of course excluded or predetermined.

The two Governments also attach great importance to the decommissioning of illegal weapons, which is why they have passed the appropriate legislation in their respective jurisdictions and agreed to establish an Independent Commission. Security experts in both jurisdictions have made preparations to brief the Commission so that options for draft schemes for decommissioning, in conformity with the Mitchell report and the Independent Commission's terms of reference, are available for discussion with all the participants from 15 September. The two Governments remain totally committed to the implementation of the Mitchell Report in all its aspects, and believe early progress on decommissioning will be an indispensable part of the confidence-building process in the negotiations. Successful decommissioning will ultimately depend on the cooperation of the paramilitary organisations themselves. But both

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Governments want to see actual decommissioning under way alongside progress in the political negotiations and look to all parties to negotiate in good faith on this basis.

The two Governments have also considered the question of Chairmanship of the Independent Commission on decommissioning. They believe that General John de Chastelain is extremely well qualified to take on this task and have therefore asked him to do so with the agreement of the parties. This clearly raises questions about General de Chastelain's ability to devote time to his other role as one of the three independent Chairmen of the political talks, in particular his proposed Chairmanship of Strand 2 of the talks. The two Governments, following consultation with the Independent Chairmen, therefore intend to propose that, to avoid problems of overload, Senator Mitchell or Prime Minister Holkeri should be available to deputise for General de Chastelain in Strand 2 whenever necessary or appropriate.

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