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DRAFT JOINT STATEMENT

(3 September)

The British and Irish Governments reaffirm their commitment to the principle of consent in all its aspects, as set out in the Downing Street Declaration. This will determine their own approach to the negotiations, from which no outcome is excluded.

Both Governments reaffirm that the aim of the negotiations is to achieve a new and lasting agreement, addressing the totality of relationships, which commands the consent of both unionists and nationalists. So a guiding principle for the negotiations, enshrined in the rules of procedure and therefore binding on all participants, is that any agreement in the negotiations must command sufficient consensus among the participants.

The rules of procedure define sufficient consensus as requiring the support of parties representing a majority of people in Northern Ireland and representing a majority of both unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland and representing a majority of the participating political parties. With the exception of Strand 1, both Governments must also support a proposition for it to command sufficient consensus.

In addition, the participants have already agreed - in a resolution adopted on 29 July 1996 - that, before finalising any comprehensive agreement, they will seek to reach consensus on whether it is capable of securing sufficiently widespread support as will give political efficacy to such agreement.

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Both Governments further reaffirm that the outcome of these negotiations, as achieved by sufficient consensus, will be submitted for public approval by referendums, North and South, before being submitted to their respective Parliaments for ratification and the earliest possible implementation.

Both Governments also welcome and fully support the proposals for the comprehensive agenda developed by the Alliance, SDLP and UUP. They note that items 1 and 2 of the agenda for each strand under these proposals are "Principles and Requirements" and "Constitutional Issues" respectively. If these proposals are adopted, the principle of consent will therefore be among the first issues to be addressed in each strand.

Although their proposals on decommissioning have not yet achieved sufficient consensus, the two Governments remain committed to the implementation of the Mitchell report in all its aspects. In particular:

- they have passed the appropriate legislation in their respective jurisdictions;
- they have agreed to establish an Independent Decommissioning Commission to facilitate the decommissioning of all illegal weapons and will formally establish the Commission on the launch of substantive negotiations;
- security experts in both jurisdictions have made preparations to brief members of the Commission so that options for draft schemes for decommissioning, in conformity with the Mitchell report and the

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Independent Commission's terms of reference, are available for discussion with all the participants from the start of substantive negotiations;

- both Governments have given an undertaking that no delay or obstacle in achieving decommissioning will be caused by any lack of Government preparation or provision and that they will immediately give effect to an appropriate scheme as soon as there is any indication that a paramilitary organisation is prepared to commence decommissioning.

Both Governments regard the confidence building process outlined in the Mitchell report, in all its aspects, as an indispensable part of the process of negotiations. Both Governments believe that, as progress is made on political issues, the decommissioning of some illegal arms during the negotiations, on a mutual basis by republican and loyalist paramilitaries, would be a major contribution to the development of the necessary mutual confidence and momentum towards agreement. Both Governments will, for their part, work to bring about such progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the substantive political negotiations. They look to all parties to work constructively and in good faith with the Governments in their efforts to secure the implementation of all aspects of the report of the International Body, including the compromise approach to decommissioning envisaged in paragraphs 34 and 35.

The two Governments also announce that they will appoint X and Y to the International Commission on Decommissioning. They have also considered

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its chairmanship. They believe that Gen John de Chastelain is extremely well qualified to take on this task and wish to appoint him. Gen de Chastelain recognises that this raises questions about his ability to devote time to his other role as one of the three Independent Chairmen of the Political Talks, in particular his role as Chairman of Strand 2. 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 Gen de Chastelain in Strand 2 whenever he considers it necessary or appropriate.

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