



NORTHERN IRELAND Information Service

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JOINT STATEMENT BELFAST, 26 AUGUST 1997

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Dr Marjorie Mowlam, MP, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Ray Burke, TD, met in Belfast this evening to review preparations for the resumption of the multi-party talks on 9 September and the launch of political negotiations on 15 September.

In line with the commitment in their Joint Communiqué of 29 July to ensure that the mechanisms for decommissioning would be capable of being launched simultaneously with substantive negotiations, the text of an Agreement providing for the establishment of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning was prepared by the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

This Agreement was signed by the Secretary of State and the Minister for Foreign Affairs this evening.

The objective of the Commission, stated in Article 3 of the Agreement, will be to facilitate the decommissioning of arms in accordance with the Report of the International Body. This reflects both Governments' commitment to implement all aspects of the International Body's report in the context of meaningful and inclusive political negotiations.

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The signing of this Agreement is a key preparatory step for the establishment of the Commission. Both Governments are committed to the Commission commencing work on a full operational basis, on the lines set out in the Government's note to the Plenary of 16 July, alongside the start of substantive negotiations on 15 September.

Work is also underway to identify potential members of the Commission. The Governments of Canada, Finland and the United States of America have been approached to identify suitable candidates. These are the countries which provided the Independent Chairmen for the International Body and the multi-party negotiations. Preparations are also in hand for the establishment of Commission offices in Belfast and Dublin.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State reaffirmed their commitment to the launch of substantive negotiations on 15 September. They reviewed preparations for the resumption of the Talks, and expressed the hope that all of the parties would work together with the two Governments on a constructive basis to complete the remainder of the opening Plenary on 9 September. They expressed their desire to see the negotiations move forward on a fully inclusive basis, with all participants committed to the principles of democracy and non-violence. They also reviewed the current security situation following the IRA ceasefire.

Both the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State expressed their desire to see rapid progress achieved in the Talks towards a settlement that can command the support and allegiance of both communities in Northern Ireland, and called on all of the political parties to join them in this work.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The Agreement signed today is an important step by the two Governments to fulfil the commitment made in the Joint Communiqué of 29 July:

"In order to ensure that the mechanics on decommissioning are capable of being launched simultaneously with substantive negotiations, as envisaged in the agenda of the opening Plenary, they have decided to complete the work needed for the signature of the international Agreement and other preparations for the establishment of an Independent Commission, so that the latter could be in a position to commence work on a full operational basis, on the lines set out in the Governments joint note to the Plenary of 16 July, alongside the start of substantive negotiations on 15 September".

2. The Agreement provides for the establishment of the Commission as an independent international body to facilitate the decommissioning of arms in accordance with the Report of the International Body and the legislation already enacted in each jurisdiction - the Decommissioning Act 1997 and the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997.

3. Article 4 of the Agreement sets out the Commission's detailed functions which will be to:

- consult with the participants in political negotiations in Northern Ireland, including both Governments, and others whom it deems relevant on the type of schemes or schemes of decommissioning including the role it might play in respect of each scheme;
- present to the two Governments proposals for schemes having due regard to the views expressed by those it has consulted;

- undertake, in accordance with regulations or schemes made in accordance with the legislation enacted in each jurisdiction, such tasks that may be required of it to facilitate the decommissioning of arms, including observing, monitoring and verifying decommissioning and receiving and auditing arms; and
 - report periodically to the two Governments and, through whatever mechanism they may establish for that purpose, the other participants in political negotiations in Northern Ireland.
4. The Agreement will come into effect alongside the launch of substantive negotiations on 15 September and it is envisaged that the Commission will begin the formal process of consultations provided for in its remit at that stage.