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POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS: CARRYING THE CONSULTATIONS**FORWARD**

[A paper setting the agenda for the consultation process, to be tabled on 15 September]

1. The two Governments have announced that they will begin intensive consultations with the parties for the purpose of producing proposals to be put to the people by referendum. The basis on which the consultations will be conducted was explained in the two Governments' joint statement (earlier today).
2. The consultations will address all the elements of a comprehensive settlement encompassing the three strands. It will be open to any participant to raise any issue it considers relevant. A list of the main elements is attached. The two Governments will be willing to consider tabling discussion papers on these or other issues that the participants might regard as useful. Papers on Strand I issues will be for the British Government alone. The two Governments expect that the parties will also want to contribute papers of their own.
3. The two Governments also intend to consult a wide range of opinion in addition to the parties. The parties may also wish to consult outside organisations or individuals themselves. In order to assist this process the two Governments intend to publish any discussion papers which they produce. They will also be happy to consider with the parties any views which outside organisations or individuals may care to submit to them.
4. The two Governments envisage that in the period up to the end of the year the participants will examine the general principles that should underpin a comprehensive settlement embracing the three Strands; complete a preliminary consideration of all the main elements of a settlement; and make as much progress as possible on a detailed examination of individual elements. The period from

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January to Easter would then be used to carry forward detailed consideration of the remaining elements and to reach provisional understandings, contingent upon an overall picture emerging. The remainder of April and May would be used to finalise the proposals to be brought forward in referenda, North and South.

5. The Governments stand ready to begin immediately the process of consulting the parties. These consultations will take place in whichever format the parties may prefer. In order to begin the process the Governments will themselves meet (tomorrow/next week) to start preliminary consideration of the paper "A comprehensive agreement: matters of mutual interest between the London and Dublin Governments", copies of which are being circulated to the parties and which will be published. The Governments look forward to receiving views on the issues covered by the paper and to meeting the parties to discuss them.
6. The two Governments will be ready to invite Senator Mitchell to bring together representatives of the parties. to co-ordinate activity within and across the three Strands and to assist the two Governments to maintain progress.

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