

Confidential

(20 November 1997)

MULTI-PARTY NEGOTIATIONS: HEADS OF AGREEMENT**A Paper by the British Government**

The Government believes it would be helpful, at this stage in the negotiations, to set out its assessment of the key components of a political settlement.

This assessment is based on a careful study of the other participants' position papers and statements, and on the Government's bilateral discussions with all the other participants. It does not represent the Government's preferred option so much as its view of the likely minimum requirements of the various participants.

Much will of course turn on the detail. But in very general terms the key components of a settlement will, on our assessment, comprise:

1. A shared understanding on constitutional issues, based on the acceptance of the consent principle in all its aspects, with consequential amendments to Articles 2 and 3 and to British constitutional legislation.
2. Locally elected and accountable institutions of government in Northern Ireland with significant administrative, and probably legislative, powers.
3. North South Structures, with at least some functions covering the island as a whole and with significant purposes and powers, but dependent on and

accountable to the institutions of government in Northern Ireland on the one hand and the Irish Government on the other.

4. Standing intergovernmental machinery (that is between the British and Irish Governments) enabling the Irish Government to express views, resolve differences and develop co-operation on matters concerning Northern Ireland which remain within the direct responsibility of the British Government.
5. East West Structures, involving the British and Irish Governments and the Northern Ireland administration, and representatives of devolved institutions in England, Scotland and Wales: a Council of these Islands.
6. Agreed provisions to address ~~in~~ the equality and justice agenda in Northern Ireland, with some underpinning of entrenched rights and safeguards.

Additionally, it will be important for many of the participants to see real evidence of commitment from the other participants to build confidence in their good faith and in their readiness to move towards an agreement on these lines.