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Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. David Andrews, at the end of the Review Plenary, 16 December 1997

We would like to have made more headway by Christmas. Nobody denies that. At the same time, I believe that the exercise of the past few weeks has been valuable in establishing a lot of common ground and in laying a basis for intensive negotiations on the core issues when we return in January.

I continue to point to the reality of how far we have come. To be at this point is real progress. People are serious, people are engaged. Despite the undoubted difficulties, the atmosphere continues to be positive. We must return now in January and work intensively at fleshing out the details. Everyone is determined to do this.

I wish to pay special tribute to the work of the Chairman, Senator Mitchell and his fellow Chairmen, Prime Minister Holkeri and General de Chastelain. Their patience, skill and wisdom continue to be of deep value to us and will be essential to the ultimate securing of agreement in these Talks.

I also welcome the continued commitment demonstrated by the other participants. People on all sides have worked hard these past weeks and days to enable progress to be made. None of us are under any illusion about the scale of the difficulties that we are facing. But we share a common determination to continue with our work towards achieving a comprehensive and honourable settlement. We all recognise that dialogue is the only credible option in pursuing that.

In light of the statement by the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister signposting a critical ten week period ahead, I believe that we are entering in January the most intensive and decisive phase of the peace process so far. I believe that it is essential that all of us engaged in these Talks grasp to the full the opportunity that now beckons.