

## MEETING WITH JOHN BRUTON 19 FEBRUARY

### NORTHERN IRELAND TALKS

#### Points To Make

As soon as the Chief Constable gave his assessment that the Provisional IRA were responsible for the murders of Brendan Campbell and Robert Dougan in Belfast last week, Mo Mowlam instigated, (on Monday 16 February) the procedure to review Sinn Féin's participation in the Talks.

As you know, that procedure requires the two Governments to consult the parties before making a determination. Discussions continued in the Plenary yesterday. Sinn Féin challenged the procedure in the Courts. (The case was adjourned until this morning) Clearly we must see how those events unfold. My over-riding concern remains to keep the integrity of this process in tact and to press on, as urgently as we possibly can, towards a political agreement by May.

Mo and I fully examined the information and evidence available to the Chief Constable. As a result we both agree with his assessment that the IRA was responsible for these murders.

No party can remain at the table if they have demonstrably dishonoured the Mitchell principles. The rules must be applied equally to all parties.

As Mo Mowlam rightly said yesterday, this is not a court of law. These are political negotiations and it is in that context that this procedure arises. We have stressed that the purpose of requiring all participants to affirm their total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles was to ensure that the Talks took place on a level playing field.

Regret very much that consideration has to be given to excluding any party. Said all along that we want as an inclusive a process as possible, leading to agreement by May. Have consistently been prepared to take measured risks for peace, to keep the parties engaged.



## INTERGOVERNMENTAL COUNCIL

### Points to Make

This idea is only at a conceptual stage; it is for discussion and negotiation in the talks process. We are responding to different ideas from the parties and obviously whatever is agreed must be workable.

The proposal is not yet refined enough to assess precisely the impact on regional structures.

The negotiations under way in Northern Ireland aim to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these Islands, and to agree new institutions and structures to take account of the Totality of relationships;

The British and Irish Governments tabled on 12 January for discussion with the parties at the talks Propositions on Heads of Agreement:

These represent our best judgement of what might be the key elements of an overall agreement;

The Intergovernmental Council is one element of the Propositions paper, which would include representatives of the British and Irish governments, the NI Administration and the devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales;

The Intergovernmental Council and the North/South Ministerial Council - another element described in the paper - will operate independently in their designated areas of responsibility;

Nothing is excluded or ruled out by the Propositions - they are for discussion in the process;

All participants are free to put forward their own proposals.

The proposal is not yet refined enough to consider any impact on regional structures.