

The International Body

Meeting with Representatives of the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP)

January 14, 1996

Belfast

Participants: Gary McMichael, Gary Matthews

Summary

Representatives of the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), associated with the loyalist paramilitary UDA, told the International Body that loyalists would not decommission any weapons until republicans had decommissioned all of theirs; agreed in general with the "Mitchell Principles"; said no decision on simultaneity of decommissioning had been taken; and stressed the importance of a republican no-first-strike pledge to mirror that given by the loyalists.

Account of Meeting

McMichael said the recent spate of drug killings was sanctioned by the IRA at a very high level. There should be a firm commitment from the IRA not to engage in violent acts. Because of the uncertainty over the IRA's intentions and its capacity for violence, loyalists cannot take the lead in decommissioning. Matthews said that loyalists will not decommission arms until Republicans have fully decommissioned theirs. The loyalist role has been purely defensive and reactive. If there were no IRA, there would be no loyalist paramilitaries. McMichael pointed to the inconsistency of the unionist position on elections and decommissioning. If the unionists would sit down with Sinn Fein after an election without any decommissioning, how do they expect to convince Sinn Fein of the need for decommissioning?

With respect to an outline of possible principles advanced by Senator Mitchell, McMichael said loyalists have pledged to employ democratic and exclusively peaceful means, agree in principle on the non-use of threat or force to influence the course or outcome of negotiations, and are committed to the removal of weapons from the political equation, the dismantlement of all armed groups, and third party oversight of decommissioning. With regard to simultaneity in decommissioning, loyalists haven't made that decision. Decommissioning is a process integral to the overall peace process. When decommissioning takes place depends on political progress. Decommissioning during negotiations would cause significant problems for unionists and would place conditions on the political talks, particularly if deadlines or timelines for decommissioning were set. It is quite possible that the

conditions for decommissioning will not be created until final agreements are in place or until after a settlement is reached. The UDP has condemned all "punishment" beatings since the ceasefires, but a cessation of such actions is not easily achievable and would be difficult to monitor. A republican no-first-strike pledge would be an enormous step forward.

Destruction of paramilitary weapons themselves would have to be negotiated, McMichael continued. It is questionable how reliable inventories of weapons would be and unrealistic to expect that every single bullet would be destroyed at any given point. Paramilitary organizations in all likelihood would not provide inventories to a third party. Such information could be contested by intelligence organizations. Modalities of decommissioning cannot be dealt with in any greater detail until negotiations are underway.

The lack of trust is a major problem, McMichael observed. Negotiations can fail. Where would the paramilitaries be then if they had given up their weapons? Loyalists continue to oppose violence, but we don't believe the republicans share our opposition.

The UDP response to a list of principles in an IB Report may not come immediately. As far as an elective body is concerned, the IB should not make recommendations. That is for the people of Northern Ireland to decide. But negotiations should not be influenced by candidates or electoral races. The UUP would try to exclude parties such as the UDP from full, equal participation.