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3. The Chairmen will no doubt produce their own drafts but hope to discuss their final approach with us (and the Irish) at 10.15 tomorrow.

(signed)

D J R HILL
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM
CB x 22298

3. We have certainly had a lot of discussion about the International Body's proposals on decommissioning and on other participants' proposals on decommissioning, but without reaching agreement on the issues. Recent bilateral and trilateral contacts between certain parties have focussed on the mechanisms necessary to enable further progress to be made on decommissioning alongside negotiations in three strands and a question has been raised about whether that has involved tackling the agreed agenda out of order. As I said on Tuesday, it has been my practice, and I believe it has been helpful, to allow a degree of latitude over the scope of any discussions in this body. It is also significant that many of the comments actually made during the earlier round table discussions on participants' various written proposals on decommissioning were about the different approaches which had been identified in these proposals. It therefore seems entirely reasonable that certain of the parties should have sought to identify common ground on that issue, as a contribution to the search for agreement on the overall agenda item. However, that does not mean and was never intended to involve us in the need to reach an agreement covering every element of agenda item 2.

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(17 December)

POSSIBLE STATEMENT TO PLENARY BY THE CHAIRMAN

1. We are currently considering item 2 on the agenda for the rest of the opening plenary which was agreed on the morning of 15 October.
2. Everyone understands that we need to reach a determination on that issue before we can proceed further down that agenda and, ultimately, commence the substantive political negotiations which could lead to a comprehensive and widely acceptable political settlement.
3. We have certainly had a lot of discussion about the International Body's proposals on decommissioning and on other participants' proposals on decommissioning, but without reaching agreement on the issues. Recent bilateral and trilateral contacts between certain parties have focussed on the "mechanisms necessary to enable further progress to be made on decommissioning alongside negotiations in three strands" and a question has been raised about whether that has involved tackling the agreed agenda out of order. As I said on Tuesday, it has been my practice, and I believe it has been helpful, to allow a degree of latitude over the scope of any discussions in this body. It is also significant that many of the comments actually made during the earlier round table discussions on participants' various written proposals on decommissioning were about the different mechanisms which had been identified in those proposals. It therefore seems entirely reasonable that certain of the parties should have sought to identify common ground on that issue, as a contribution to the search for agreement on the overall agenda item. However, that does not - and was never intended to - absolve us of the need to reach an agreement covering every element of agenda item 2.

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4. My colleagues and I have kept in close touch with developments over the past few weeks and we have had the opportunity to consult all the participants afresh over the past 48 hours. We are concerned to facilitate the search for agreement and we remain ready, with the support of all the participants, to exercise the power conferred by Rule 30 (a) of our rules of procedure, that is to put forward a solution which we believe will secure agreement.
5. In putting forward any such suggested solution we would wish to build to the maximum possible extent on any common ground which may have emerged in contacts between the participants themselves. We have been very encouraged by the considerable progress made in the trilateral discussions which have been taking place between the UUP, SDLP and Alliance Party on the mechanisms necessary to enable further progress to be made on decommissioning alongside negotiations in the three strands. So far as we can judge, the elements on which they have reached agreement are unlikely to be contentious for other participants.
6. However, that agreement is not total in that the precise scope of some parts of the proposed mechanisms is not yet settled between the parties concerned. In our view that difference of view is capable of being resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned.
7. Equally, there are other aspects of agenda item 2 which have not been covered in those trilateral discussions and which would need to be brought in to any proposal we might put forward under Rule 30 (a).
8. All this puts a heavy responsibility on the Chair. If the participants still believe it would be helpful to exercise our power under Rule 30 (a) we are prepared to undertake that task. However, we do not feel we are yet ready to do so. We have not

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yet identified a solution which we believe will secure agreement. We do not despair of being able to do so, but we need more time, initially to reflect on what we have heard over the past 48 hours, then to float some preliminary suggestions with at least some of the parties and ultimately to see whether we can indeed put together a proposal which could become a solution which will secure agreement.

9. What I therefore propose is that plenary should now adjourn until 27 January, but that the talks facilities should be available for use by delegations, on a limited basis, from 13 January. During the two weeks after 13 January we would like participants to be available for meetings with us. We will be in touch with party delegations about scheduling such meetings. Obviously we would encourage the participants to meet together if that would be helpful in widening the area of common ground, and would asked to be kept abreast of any developments.
10. If that is acceptable I adjourn the plenary until 27 January, wishing you all a very Happy Christmas.

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MULTI-PARTY NEGOTIATIONS

1. The Independent Chairmen of the multi-party negotiations, Senator George Mitchell, today adjourned the plenary meeting until 27 January. However, the participants undertook to be available for bilateral discussions from 13 January.
2. Those meetings will include meetings between all participants and the Independent Chairmen. The Chairmen will, in the light of recent indications of some degree of convergence on certain issues, explore whether there is a basis for exercising the power conferred on them by the rules of procedure, in circumstances where there is no unanimity on an issue, to put forward a solution they believe will secure agreement on the handling of decommissioning.
3. The Chairmen noted that the participants in the negotiations had all made a significant commitment of time and effort to the negotiations over the past six months and had made serious efforts to address and resolve the various substantial obstacles to agreement. They reiterated their view that the talks process provides the best opportunity to address all the issues which need to be resolved in the search for a comprehensive and widely acceptable political settlement and expressed the hope that all participants would return after Christmas with renewed determination to live up to their responsibilities in that regard.

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