

MEETING OF LIAISON SUBCOMMITTEE ON DECOMMISSIONING MONDAY 17 NOVEMBER 1997 (1608)

CHAIRMEN: Senator Mitchell
Mr Holkeri

THOSE PRESENT: British Government
Irish Government

Alliance
Labour
Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
Progressive Unionist Party
Sinn Féin
Social Democratic & Labour Party
Ulster Democratic Party
Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman (Senator Mitchell) convened the meeting at 1608. He stated that this was the second meeting of the Liaison Sub Committee on Decommissioning established pursuant to the Procedural Motion adopted by the Plenary on 24 September. The Chairman recalled that the Sub Committee was charged with assisting, as appropriate, the implementation of all aspects of decommissioning as set out in the Report of the International Body. There were three dimensions to this (a) the consideration of any legislative proposals by the Governments and any proposed regulations; (b) consideration of the type of scheme or schemes for decommissioning and the role of the Independent Commission in respect of same and (c) consideration

of proposals for such schemes drawn up by the Independent Commission, and to submit any agreed opinion on the proposals for consideration by the Commission.

2. The Chairman continued by saying it had been his intention to take up (c) today under the expectation that the Independent Commission would have presented its proposals to the meeting in advance. The Chairman stated however that he had had several conversations with General de Chastelain, including one earlier in the day, on this issue but, unfortunately, the Commission's proposals would not be available for another few days. The Chairman said, in light of this, he thought that the Sub Committee should meet again on 1 December so that participants had a chance to review the Commission's proposals by then. The Chairman suggested that the General and his colleagues be invited to make an oral presentation to participants on 1 December, prior to the commencement of the review Plenary, having received the Commission's proposals prior to that date. The Chairman suggested that this meeting focus on (a), consideration of legislative proposals by the Governments. Before asking each Government to comment, the Chairman asked participants for their agreement to the amended timetable.

3. The UUP voiced its concern that the Commissions's proposals were still not available to the meeting, given that the original deadline outlined for this had been late October/early November. The party said, given this position, its presence at the meeting was verging on the unnecessary. It then asked the Chairman whether he had been suggesting that both Governments

brief the participants on their respective legislation. The Chairman confirmed this. The UUP said it hoped it wasn't going to hear about the Governments' primary legislation since this was old news in any event. Furthermore if there was to be a briefing on secondary legislation, how could this take place in the absence of any proposals from the Independent Commission?

4. The Chairman said he was not in a position to respond to the UUP's question, but asked the British Government to comment. The British Government said that it was present to offer a briefing on its primary legislation since some participants had asked for this at the first meeting. The UUP said it remained unhappy about devising a means to talk about something which was already under the bridge. It was the schemes and the associated secondary legislation which were important, not the existing primary legislation. Alliance said it was regrettable that no substantive business was before the meeting. The first meeting of the Sub Committee had taken place some six weeks earlier and participants had been told that the Independent Commission would have its proposals ready for discussion at this meeting. Now there was another delay and participants still hadn't seen the proposals. None of this was helping the view that decommissioning was a serious matter and would be seen to be handled accordingly in the public's eyes. The party said it was disappointed with this use of time. If some participants required a "briefing" on the primary legislation, then this should be arranged in the normal way.

5. The Irish Government said it was also present to provide a briefing on its primary legislation. The Chairman said he took full account of the comments received but wished to proceed with the presentations from both Governments. The British Government then provided a section by section overview of its Act and associated schedule. The Irish Government presented a similar overview of its legislation.

6. The Chairman asked whether there were any objections to proceeding in the manner outlined earlier. Hearing none, he reminded participants that the next meeting of the Sub Committee would occur on 1 December, at a time to be determined (but most likely in the morning). He would liaise with General de Chastelain in respect of timing and to ensure that both he and his two colleagues from the Commission would be present to make an oral presentation and respond to questions. In the interim the Chairman said he would ensure the Commission's proposals were distributed to participants as soon as possible. With that the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 1643.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
19 November 1997