

**SUMMARY RECORD OF PLENARY SESSION -
TUESDAY 13 JANUARY 1998 (1413)**

Those present:

INDEPENDENT CHAIRMEN	GOVERNMENT TEAMS	PARTIES
Senator Mitchell	British Government	Alliance
Mr Holkeri	Irish Government	Labour
General de Chastelain		Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
		Progressive Unionist Party
		Sinn Féin
		Social Democratic & Labour Party
		Ulster Democratic Party
		Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman convened the meeting at 1413 and recalled at the previous day's plenary that it had been agreed the Governments' document "Propositions on Heads of Agreement" would be tabled, as it had been, and therefore subject to discussion in this session. The Chairman said he believed it would be helpful in terms of proceeding, subject to the views of participants, for both Governments to present their opening remarks on the paper with a tour de table to follow, during which participants' comments would be heard without interruption. Following completion of this, the Chairman said he would seek to determine the way forward. Hearing no objections to this approach, he asked the British Government to open the discussion, pointing out that this approach appeared to provide a fair and equitable opportunity for everyone to offer comment.

2. The British Government said it wished to thank the Chairman and his colleagues for their valuable assistance and guidance towards the process both prior to and since the Christmas break. The British Government said that if one was to look at the media headlines in both Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and on the mainland following yesterday's events, there seemed to be an

image of hope coming through despite the terrible events over the last three weeks. It said it was sure that everybody would condemn those murders which had occurred and send their sympathy and condolences to the families and relatives of the victims.

3. The British Government said that despite the present situation there was a determination on the part of the participants to move the process on and in doing so achieve some momentum towards a successful conclusion. It stated that all should also congratulate the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach who, over the Christmas and New Year recess, had worked hard to kick-start the process which was what everyone in Northern Ireland was hoping would happen. The British Government said that while that process had ultimately resulted in the document now tabled, the talks process here was about putting the details on those outline proposals. The British Government said it wished to thank all the participants for their measured responses to the document since its release the previous day. It was important to remember what the document represented and what it was for. It was a starting point, a basis for negotiations and an agenda.

4. The British Government said the main themes in the document were not new: devolution in Northern Ireland, a North/South Council and a Council of the British Isles which would take account of new devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales. The document recognised these as the vital elements in an overall settlement. The British Government said the participants should now move into detailed negotiations, using the document, right away. What was required as a next step was for Plenary to think about the exact mechanisms required to carry forward such negotiations. There was a need to make rapid progress since there were only 10 to 12 weeks left and, as could be seen from the Christmas break, events outside the process could easily destabilise it. It was important now to get going and keep up the momentum in negotiations so that the process could fulfil the hope of everyone in Northern Ireland that a peaceful and lasting

settlement for all could be achieved. The British Government said, in conclusion, that it wished to commend the document as a basis for such negotiation to occur.

5. The Irish Government said there were those around the table who had disagreed about many things. But it thought it was safe to say that everyone was agreed on at least one thing: that the time had finally come to move decisively forward towards the achievement of political agreement. It stated that everyone could no longer allow themselves to stand back from the work of genuine and committed negotiation. The events of the weeks since the process had last met had underlined just how unacceptable were the alternatives to democratic dialogue. It was equally clear that the process would not succeed in making progress simply by everyone repeating their opening positions. If one was to move forward one needed some sense of focus and direction, a context in which to situate the future work on detail. There was a need to set out the broad parameters within which a possible settlement might be found.

6. The Irish Government said it was for that reason, and in that spirit, that both it and the British had worked intensively over the Christmas break to complete work on the paper tabled by the Chair in the name of the two Governments yesterday. Its title - "Propositions on Heads of Agreement" - accurately conveyed both Governments' intentions and the scope of the paper. The propositions were put forward as a basis for the discussion of the detail necessary for negotiation in moving to an agreement. They were for debate and discussion.

7. The Irish Government said the propositions were, in a real sense, derived from the views of all parties and followed from the various statements agreed and promulgated by the two Governments in recent years. The Governments believed they represented a road map to what could be a generally acceptable outcome. The various elements, taken together, offered only what was, in its view, the outline of an acceptable agreement. As was obvious, these were not

detailed proposals. Even if consensus were to be reached that they constituted a satisfactory package, a great deal of work would still be necessary. But it believed that the propositions did offer a basis for detailed discussion.

8. The Irish Government said it was its frank assessment - a view which had been reinforced by debates in the talks - that, if an agreement was to be achieved, it must include elements along the lines described. The paper was an honest attempt to describe the ballpark within which agreement could be reached. It tried to be comprehensive, through addressing all of the issues which seem important to any participant. It encompassed constitutional issues; structures in Northern Ireland; North/South institutions; East/West structures; the protection of rights; and justice, equality, prisoners, policing and other issues. The paper also aimed to achieve a balance between what parties might like to achieve. The Irish Government said, as various commentators had pointed out, there was nothing in this paper that was radically new. It regarded that, not as a weakness, but as a strength. Much work had been done over several years by the Governments and by each party present. It was inevitable, therefore, that what had been put forward represented a distillation of that work. In particular, the Irish Government said it remained firmly committed to the balance of principles and of institutional proposals set out in the Joint Declaration and in the Framework Document. The Framework Document recognised the need for "new institutions and structures to take account of the totality of relationships and to enable the people of Ireland to work together in all areas of common interest while fully respecting their diversity". That insight continued to underpin its approach.

10. The Irish Government said there was a need for balanced constitutional change; for new institutions to accommodate and express the key relationships in each of the three strands; and for action on a wide range of other issues. There had to be a balance within and between these particular elements.

Nevertheless, from its perspective, it was clear that, as the SDLP leader had so often said, the key relationship which needed to be resolved was that between the two traditions on the island of Ireland.

11. It said it placed particular weight on the need for a new and constructive relationship between North and South, one capable of developing by agreement over time. The North/South Ministerial Council proposed in the joint paper, and the implementation bodies and mechanisms for policies agreed by it in meaningful areas and at all-island level, had to have the capacity to take serious action, by agreement, in a range of areas of key importance to the people of both parts of the island. The Irish Government said that remained an indispensable part of any settlement.

12. It said it looked forward to the further development of British-Irish relationships. But the North/South relationship had a particular weight and specificity. The Ministerial Council would operate independently in its designated areas of responsibility. However, the basic rule of the talks remained in place: that nothing would be finally agreed in any format until everything was agreed in the negotiations as a whole. But the Irish Government said it would hope to gain from the parties a sense that the broad thrust of the propositions was very much on the right lines.

13. As a next step, the Irish Government said both it and the British Government believed that all parties might, without prejudicing their positions, consider agreeing to move on to negotiate in detail in all the areas identified as propositions. This should aim to provide the basis for the judgement and decisions for agreement that could emerge from that process of negotiation. More detailed papers on each area might be developed for presentation and discussion in the appropriate format. It would be through this more concentrated work that all would develop the actual parts of a possible agreement. At each point, work in

the different Strands would need to remain closely co-ordinated and synchronised.

14. The Irish Government said it commended the propositions to everyone and looked forward to receiving views on them. It asked all to give the propositions the most serious consideration. It went without saying that it would wish to continue meeting each and every party in bilaterals. Furthermore, it urged all parties to engage intensively in dialogue across the board, without restriction. It was vital that debate encompassed all parties, and that each should test its ideas with all others. The Irish Government said that everyone together must prove the talks were capable finally of setting in train real engagement on issues of substance, and of achieving a comprehensive and honourable settlement.

15. Alliance said it had felt self critical at the Christmas break since it believed the process in general had failed to reach agreement on any matters of substance. The party said everyone ought to bear self scrutiny and self criticism for that position. Alliance said it thought it should also criticise both Governments for not doing enough to ensure that a different conclusion was reached at that time. The party said, however, that the previous day had brought everyone the opportunity for commendation and perhaps congratulation since the document which had been tabled was a real engine for the process to use in moving in a forward direction. The mood of criticism should therefore give way to one of optimism.

16. Alliance said the contents of the Governments' document had come from the debates in the talks process, from prior discussions, from other experiences and from the work carried out over the Christmas break. The party said everyone should be able to feel a part of it and it was a basis for real negotiation. Alliance said much comment had been made and much frustration aired about real

negotiations not starting. The Governments' document was, however, evidence that the negotiations had begun.

17. Alliance referred to the new opportunities which had developed in the British Isles which would allow everyone to develop and make repairs to all sorts of relationships which had been disturbed by the events of 1920. In particular the recent developments of bringing home rule to Scotland and Wales provided a positive signal and real opportunities to develop these relationships. The party said that perhaps home rule in Ireland, 100 years previously, might have helped avoid the present situation in Northern Ireland. Alliance said it believed there would be enormous benefit if Scotland and Wales could be involved in an intergovernmental Council to deal with the totality of relationships. Although much work had still to be done to find mechanisms to achieve this, it was an interesting thought to consider the interaction there would be when nationalists in Scotland and Wales met nationalists in Ireland.

18. The party said it was important to caution that such building of relationships was not considered to be over and above what progress took place elsewhere but rather alongside this. Similarly the European Union also offered models and mechanisms for consideration in developing the proposals in the document and how the negotiations from here on in might be organised. In relation to the North/South Ministerial Council, Alliance said it would not be possible to hermetically seal off certain aspects of the negotiations one from the other. The Ministerial Council fitted into Strand Two, but such a Council had implications for the form of Government in Northern Ireland. In terms of carrying forward further negotiations Alliance said it believed it might be better to ask each of the Strands to take the full document, rather than splitting it up, thereby allowing different members in each Strand to consider that which was appropriate to it.

19. Alliance said it was profoundly encouraged by the immediate and constructive response which had been given by everyone towards the document as a whole. Given these events yesterday, the party said it didn't now wish for everyone to become involved in a procedural wrangle on how to move the negotiations forward but rather hoped that the suggestion it had made might be helpful in moving the process forward quickly.

20. Labour said it shared previously voiced concerns about the deaths which had occurred in the last three weeks. The party fully understood how the cease-fires had allowed a more relaxed situation to develop in the community but now people were again seriously concerned about a return to violence. The party said it welcomed the Governments paper and broadly welcomed its contents. Labour said the document could have been implemented through the sub group's focus on key issues before Christmas if the will had been present to do that. The party said the key proposals in the Governments' document were broadly in line with parties proposals submitted last November. Most of the ideas contained in it were present prior to Christmas.

21. Labour said it wished to make a few points regarding the document. With reference to the Northern Ireland Assembly proposal, the party said it was not content with the limited powers described. It also noted that legislative powers were mentioned in the document and said it wished to discuss the scope and detail of such powers with the British Government and other parties. Labour asked what the responsibilities would be of an Intergovernmental Council and would the Government consult Scotland and Wales on this proposal in due course? In terms of the North/South Ministerial Council, the party recalled its earlier view that any North/South institutions had to be open, transparent and accountable to each Government. Labour said it wanted to know more about the constitution of such a Council. This had to be looked at closely and in particular whether other elected representatives would form part of its membership. In relation to implementation bodies,

Labour said that there had been discussions on this prior to Christmas. The functions and responsibilities of such bodies needed to be very firmly qualified. The party didn't want a load of quangos appearing throughout Ireland from such an approach. With regard to standing intergovernmental machinery, the party asked what would be the role and responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Office in all of this. In addition would the NIO have an overseeing role of the workings of the Northern Ireland Assembly since this was a vitally important aspect? On human rights, Labour said it supported the proposal for a Bill of Rights. There also had to be emphasis on ensuring the protection of collective as well as individual rights. It was also worth considering the issue of prisoners in this context.

22. Labour said in terms of proceeding, there were matters in the document relevant to the Strand concept. It hoped that there would be bilaterals with other parties so that all could work out exactly what was on offer from the document. In concluding its remarks, Labour said it welcomed the document and looked forward to reaching agreement on the detail as soon as possible.

23. The NIWC said the document should be viewed as an operating tool. It welcomed the paper saying it was now time to move forward. The NIWC said everyone had been chastened over Christmas by the failure of the process prior to the break but perhaps because of this all could now give some extra commitment to taking a step forward. The party said there was still a risk in tabling the document yesterday but it believed this was the right decision. It concluded, from its contacts, that the community had welcomed the development which was just as well since the process couldn't have afforded to send a further negative signal on another "first day back".

24. The NIWC added that it believed the media coverage of yesterday's events had been different. The media's search for

entrenched positions had not materialised but instead an air of optimism had been generated. The party said it had also been a useful exercise to read the editorial comments of some of the newspapers which had reinforced this latter view. The party said the document was an agenda and a starting point which was to be built upon. In terms of the structure of the negotiations, the party said there was an overlap between issues. This was evident from the work in the sub group before Christmas. The party said, on that basis, it believed the document should be handled in a holistic fashion and consequently a working group of the Plenary should be established under rule 5. The party said this approach might speed up the negotiation process thereby reducing delay and deadwood. The NIWC said it would hate to think that the process would spend hours and hours dealing with the future format of the negotiations and not the substance. There was a need to inject as much brevity and speed as possible. There would clearly be a need for clarification on various aspects of the document. The devil was in the detail but the party hoped that clarification would be sought by all as soon as possible since any desire not to seek it only spread fear and anxiety, particularly if such an approach was predetermined.

25. The NIWC said it had some questions regarding participatory democracy in Northern Ireland. The party said it was heartened to read in the document that there would be provisions in such institutions "to ensure that all sections of the community can participate and work together". Inclusive democratic institutions were needed. If this could not be achieved, then the outcome of the process would not be successful. The NIWC said it was important to move forward and forge agreement on the principles and requirements which had already been set down. The process had to move forward in this spirit and take the Governments document as a starting point. The party, in conclusion, said it hoped that everyone would adopt a position of collective negotiating in moving forward to reach an acceptable outcome for all.

25. The PUP said yesterday had been a significant day, though it had not felt like it at the time. The party said the Governments' document was an acceptable framework for moving the negotiations forward. The PUP said it believed that in order to facilitate successful negotiations, the document as a whole should be passed to each of the Strands without delay.

26. Sinn Féin said it believed that the process everyone was involved in was about changing the status quo. The party said it had made that statement in order to match it against previous Government statements which had also made clear that the status quo was not an option for an outcome. The Governments had also stated there could be no internal settlement. Sinn Féin said the process was about building an acceptance in the community that the management of change needed to occur. No one could agree that partition was working. Nationalists had been excluded from governmental structures. It had been impossible to buy into those structures or for them to give any authority to that community. Sinn Féin said many people had looked at the mechanics of providing a process of genuine political negotiations on the island of Ireland. The present conflict could only be resolved when agreement among all the participants was found. This in itself implied a process of genuine negotiations occurring. But to date this hadn't happened.

27. Sinn Féin said the Governments might well have succeeded in attempting to create an environment where serious negotiations needed to take place. But the party would see, very quickly whether this was actually going to take place. Sinn Féin said it would not accept the proposals in the Governments' document if this meant that they (the Governments) were resiling from previous statements. The party was present to negotiate a settlement with others. There were many issues which had to be dealt with in the process - one of them being rights. The party said, in this regard, that partition had failed throughout its term and there was simply no argument which justified maintaining the status quo. The

whole concept of partition was nonsense in the modern world - five million people on one island with two separate Government tax, energy and economic systems, not to mention education and transport. Partition hadn't satisfied nationalists and if unionists were truthful it hadn't improved their position either. There was even more instability in the unionist community now than in 1921. The party said one had to bear in mind that change was happening anyway and all around everyone. Either the participants could react as spectators to this change or take the opportunity to manage it in a positive and constructive manner. It was impossible to know, given the pace of change, where the community would be in 10/15 years time. Was it therefore the case that people were going to cling to majoritarianism and then simply flip over when a new majority occurred? Sinn Féin said all parties had to be prepared to lead their electorate into a new democratic beginning. The party would play its full part if it believed a new beginning was being offered through the process.

28. The SDLP said it welcomed the document stating that at last participants were getting down to the business that brought them together at the table. The party said it appreciated the action taken by the Governments yesterday. It hoped everyone could now get down immediately to agreeing methods whereby those real issues could be discussed and negotiated.

29. The UDP said it had reservations on the document. So, probably, had everyone else. Nevertheless the party said it welcomed the fact that the Governments' now accepted the reality of the situation as had been shown in a document which went beyond the Framework Document and now dealt with the symmetry of relationships. The UDP said the document did represent the broad character of what was required for a realistic settlement. The party viewed this development as progress at a time when the community itself had been crying out for such progress.

30. The UDP said, however, that no one should get too carried away with the present position. There was still plenty of negotiations to take place on the detail. The document didn't comprehensively represent the views of all but did represent the bones for negotiations to begin in earnest. The party said, as regards the next steps, that the process should charge the Chairmen with drawing up agendas for each of the Strands so that work could begin on real negotiations next week. The UDP said it hoped no one would miss the opportunity now presented to get on and deal with the issues as soon as possible.

31. The UUP said the document by definition was not detailed and therefore open to interpretation. It was, however, a basis for negotiations. It noted Labour's comments regarding consultation with Scotland and Wales on aspects of the Intergovernmental Council but the party said it had no doubt that the British Government would have little difficulty on this in due course. Perhaps the devil was on the detail, but also salvation was in the small print! The UUP said it supported the Alliance proposal in terms of the next steps ie the full document going to each Strand. Some helpful briefing might also be given to the participants on the detail of how devolution in Scotland and Wales was designed to work to enable the process to reach decisions relatively quickly on this aspect.

32. The Chairman said it was clear there was common ground and a genuine desire among the participants to move forward promptly to serious negotiations. There was a willingness to use the Governments' paper to facilitate negotiation despite the reservations expressed by some parties. The Chairman outlined two ways of proceeding. Under the first, proposed by Alliance, PUP and UUP the document would be submitted to the Strands, where detailed negotiations would commence. Under the second, put forward by the NIWC, a working group of the plenary would be established to begin negotiations. The UDP had proposed that the agenda for these first meetings be set initially by the Chairman of whichever format participants decided on. The Chairman proposed that participants

be represented by two delegates and two support staff at these meetings. This latter point was agreed to. The Chairman then invited comment on the proposed format of the negotiations.

33. The SDLP proposed that both formats be adopted, as a mechanism would be needed for dealing with cross strand issues. The PUP concurred, proposing that negotiations take place during the first week in the strands, and thereafter as the SDLP had proposed. The UUP objected to the establishment of a sub-group to deal with cross strand issues, proposing that the document be dealt with in the strands. The SDLP confirmed to Alliance that a cross strand issues committee would be similar to a sub-group of the plenary. Sinn Féin said it supported the SDLP proposal as everyone was supposed to be addressing the totality of arrangements. The NIWC also supported the SDLP's proposals.

34. The UUP said it was reluctant to commit to a sub-group of the plenary today and urged participants to begin negotiations in the strands and see how this developed. Alliance said it understood the UUP difficulty, which it believed was not a principled objection, as there had been sub-groups established in the past. It suggested that everyone proceed on the basis that a sub-group could be called by the chair with the consent of the parties. The UUP replied that it did not believe the Chairman would consult the participants on a course of action if he anticipated opposition from one of the parties. The Chairman responded that he would certainly consult the participants on any proposed course of action. The SDLP asked the UUP how it proposed to deal with Strand Three issues if it insisted that negotiations take place in the strands alone. The UUP responded that it wished to see negotiations commence in the strands; other issues could be dealt with as and when necessary.

35. The PUP said the document should be referred to the strands; over-lapping items would have to be dealt with by a sub-group of the Plenary. The NIWC said the speediest way to achieve progress

would be through the establishment of a working group. The party said it would be difficult to divide the paper into elements under each of the strands, and that to do so might become a cause of dissension. It suggested the UUP might wish to consult, to which the UUP responded that it had done so; the party position was that work should proceed in the strands.

36. The Chairman said there was no disagreement that negotiations should commence in sub-groups of the strands next week, and proposed that Strand One meet on Monday 19 January at 1100 and Strand Two on Tuesday 20 January at 1100. These meetings would take place with two delegates and two support staff from each participant. The agenda for the first meeting in each strand would be prepared by the respective Chairmen. This was agreed to. The Chairman said there was a clear sentiment for proceeding, at some future time, with the establishment of a sub-group of the Plenary to address cross strand issues, but that the UUP were at present opposed to the establishment of such a committee and had neither ruled it out or ruled it in. If the Chairman determined there was a need to establish a sub-group at some future time, which he expected to be the case, he would consult with all of the participants before calling a meeting in this format. If there was serious opposition from one or more participants to this course of action, the Chairman would call a meeting of the full Plenary to reach a determination on the issue. This was agreed to.

37. The SDLP said it wished to record its reservations about this approach. It had proposed that both courses of action be followed; now they were being asked to accommodate the wishes of just one party. The party said it was not saying that the sub-group should meet now, but that there should be some agreed facility for dealing with cross strand issues. The SDLP believed it would be detrimental to the process if meetings in sub-group format were to be dependent on the assent of the UUP. The UUP said it was happy to take guidance from the chair. Meetings next week would address the document in the strands; the following week there would be

meetings in London. Where cross strand issues arose the Chairman would consult and, if appropriate, refer the issue to Plenary. The party was not trying to be obstructionist. The SDLP said the UUP approach was obstructionist, as it had not explained its objection to a sub-group. It said cross strand issues would arise, and then the UUP approach would become clear. If they would accept a sub-group in the future, why oppose one now? The SDLP said some participants felt negotiations should only move forward in sub-group format, but had agreed to both formats to respect the views of others. It asked the UUP to reciprocate and accommodate the wishes of the other parties.

38. Alliance said meetings in plenary, the three strands and the Business Committee were all provided for in the Rules of Procedure. Whilst it might be helpful to introduce another format they should remember that it would not have the same standing in the Rules of Procedure. The SDLP contended that sub-group format was provided for in the Rules of Procedure, and Sinn Féin said the Rules allowed Plenary to establish any number of committees under rule 5. The UUP said the strand process was the process that had been agreed among the participants, and said the Chairman had made a fair suggestion.

39. The Chairman said there was no disagreement that meetings would take place next week in the strands. There was, he said, a clear sentiment that there would have to be, at an early opportunity, a working group to address cross strand issues. He noted that the sole objection to the establishment of such a group came from the UUP. As there was no requirement for the working group to meet next week, he repeated his earlier proposal regarding consultation prior to calling a meeting of a working group. The Chairman noted that paragraph five of the Rules of Procedure authorised the establishment of a sub-group of the plenary, and that such a group had met during December for a stated period of time, although it had been unable to fulfil its mandate, which had now expired. He said it was inevitable that there would have to be

some mechanism to deal with cross strand issues, and that there was clear agreement, bar one participant, that this mechanism would be a working sub-group of the plenary. Moving on the Chairman commended all the participants for their acceptance of the Governments' paper as the basis for negotiation, despite the stated reservations of some parties about some aspects its content. They were beginning what would be the most important and, he hoped, concluding phase of the negotiations. There would be no further meetings of the Plenary this week, and he asked participants to begin considering when the next meeting of the Review Plenary should take place.

40. Sinn Féin said it would be of immense help to the talks process if the UUP would engage fully with it. The party referred to killings over the past months, during which time 10 Catholics had been killed by loyalists. These had intensified over the Christmas period. It noted considerable opposition within the UUP to the negotiations and referred to threats from some quarters of loyalism to withdraw from the talks. It said these facts had contributed to a climate that had made the recent deaths inevitable, including that of Billy Wright in Long Kesh. Sinn Féin said there was a widespread belief in the nationalist community that some of the killings had been committed by the LVF and some by the LVF and UDA. It said it feared there would be imminent further attacks on the nationalist community.

41. Sinn Féin said it hoped the UUP would recognise that a decision to engage with it would improve the atmosphere outside the talks. There was talk of reaching an agreement by March. How could everyone enter a new phase in the negotiations if the UUP refused to engage with the third largest party in Northern Ireland, representing 120,000 voters? Sinn Féin also criticised of some parties' recourse to Downing Street. The party wanted to see a resolution, but this could only be achieved through a fully inclusionary process in which all of the participants talked to each other. It warned that violent events outside the talks could

easily destabilise the process, as they had seen. These attacks were designed to destroy the peace process. The best way to prevent this, apart from action by the two Governments, was to show those hostile to the process that everyone was serious by talking to each other.

42. The PUP said no-one in the negotiations was responsible for any of the deaths. It said it had not threatened to withdraw from the negotiations, nor issued threats of any kind. It said it had flagged difficulties with confidence building measures in order to help the process. The party said there was a threat implicit in Sinn Féin's statement that refusal to engage with it bilaterally would result in a deterioration of the situation.

43. Sinn Féin denied that there was any threat in what it had said, and said it had accused no-one in the room. The party said that people who had decided not to talk with other participants contributed to the alternative situation. If everyone did not talk and negotiate they would all be responsible for the consequences. Sinn Féin said the nationalist community had recently heard William Thompson, William Ross and two other UUP MP's condemn their party's participation in the talks. In addition, there had been calls from Ken Maginnis and Jeffrey Donaldson to reconsider the party's position. This was a majority of Unionist MP's. There was also the recent crisis within loyalism. It said this had produced extreme pessimism in the nationalist community. Sinn Féin did not wish to see another violent attack, but the unmistakable perception was that the Orange card was being played. The party was not blaming the PUP or UDP which had made powerful and courageous contributions to the search for peace. It said the PUP knew whom it referred to, and said everyone had their difficulties, as there were also republican groups opposed to the peace process. Sinn Féin wished to avoid any more deaths. It believed there were elements in the UUP which were coming to believe that the only way to reach a settlement was to engage with Sinn Féin, but they were being prevented from advocating such a policy by pressure within

their own party. If the UUP were to engage with Sinn Féin this would be a very positive development and a signal for the peace process.

44. There being no further comment, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 1555 to resume at the call of the Chair. Meetings in Strands One and Two would take place the following week as previously agreed. Agendas for these meetings would be circulated by the Chairman. The question of establishing a sub-group to address cross strand issues would be handled as proposed by the Chairman.

**Independent Chairmen Notetakers
19 January 1998**

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