

British-Irish Council
Eighth Summit, London, 2 June 2006

COMMUNIQUÉ

The British-Irish Council, established under the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday 1998, held its eighth Summit meeting today at the Excel Conference Centre, London. The British and Irish Governments were represented by Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott MP, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dermot Ahern TD.

The Scottish Executive was represented by Nicol Stephen MSP, Deputy First Minister and the Welsh Assembly Government by Carwyn Jones AM, Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside.

The Isle of Man was represented by Chief Minister Donald Gelling MLC; Guernsey was represented by Chief Minister Laurie Morgan; and Jersey was represented by Senator Frank Walker, Chief Minister.

A full list of delegation members is attached.

The British-Irish Council is a forum for Members to exchange information, discuss, consult and endeavour to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest.

The Council recognised the ongoing commitment of the two Governments to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. In that context, it welcomed the Joint Statement by the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Blair in Armagh on 6 April, setting out the Governments' joint strategy to achieve restoration of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland this year. The Council called on the political parties in Northern Ireland to take advantage of this opportunity to make progress towards restoration.

Environment

The main focus of today's meeting was climate change, which forms a significant part of the work of the Environment Group, in which the British Government takes the lead.

The Council recognised that, as well as mitigating future emissions, BIC Members must also look at how to adapt to the impacts of unavoidable climate change. Ministers availed of the opportunity to share experience and exchange knowledge in order to improve our understanding of the impacts of climate change and to develop appropriate adaptation strategies.

The Council recognised the importance of scientific knowledge in developing effective strategies to prepare for the impacts of climate change. The Council agreed to look at ways in which Governments, Agencies and researchers across the British-Irish Council region can work together to improve our understanding of the impacts of climate change.

The Council agreed on a number of further areas where the BIC could usefully examine the impacts of climate change. These include impacts on the marine environment, the increased likelihood of extreme weather events, implications for energy and transport infrastructure, and the potential effects on the economies of BIC Members. The Council agreed on a number of proposals for work going forward including participation in the Marine Climate Change Partnership, the sharing of best practice, participation in a workshop on the development of adaptation strategies, and the establishment of a working group on indicators of climate change impacts and adaptation.

The Council looked forward to the development of the next set of UKCIP climate scenarios, due for publication in 2008, which will be of benefit to all of the BIC Administrations. The Council also noted that the results of ongoing research projects under the Irish ERTDI (Environmental Research, Technological Development and Innovation) programs will be available from 2006.

The Council agreed that the discussion paper on adapting to climate change prepared for today's meeting will be published on the British-Irish Council website. The paper

summarises the work of the Council to date in this area and provides information on the impacts of climate change specific to the British-Irish Council region.

The Council tasked officials to prepare a paper on how best to take forward the recommendations arising from today's discussion for the Ministerial meeting scheduled to take place in July 2006.

Under the agenda item 'Improved co-operation between Ireland and Britain on nuclear safety and emergency planning', the Irish Government outlined to the Summit its continuing concerns about Sellafield and nuclear safety generally, while acknowledging improved co-operation in recent times between Britain and Ireland on nuclear safety matters.

In addition to the discussion on Environment issues, the Council was updated on work being undertaken in other British-Irish Council areas by the relevant Administrations.

Misuse of Drugs

The Irish Government leads the work of the Council in relation to the Misuse of Drugs. At a Ministerial meeting in Dublin in December 2005, Ministers reiterated their firm commitment to combating the misuse of drugs and agreed a programme of work going forward. The focus of work in the period ahead will be on the confiscation of criminal assets, rehabilitation of drug misusers, the use of subutex as substitution treatment for opiate misusers, and the challenges presented by cocaine misuse. It is planned to hold another Ministerial meeting towards the end of 2006.

e-Health (Telemedicine)

Telemedicine (the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients by use of telecommunications technology) and the broader topic of e-health, was the main topic of discussion at the last BIC Summit meeting in the Isle of Man in May 2005. Work going forward will focus on addressing issues relating to interoperable technical standards, a relevant clinical governance framework, appropriate protocols for the secure electronic exchange of confidential data, and

quality standards for telemedicine and e-health information on the internet. Recognising the ever-increasing role of e-Health, the Council approved the proposal to change the name of the Telemedicine working group to the e-Health working group.

Knowledge Economy

Jersey takes the lead in the Council on work in relation to the Knowledge Economy. The focus in the period ahead will be on the sustainability of business in the context of potential serious threats, either from criminal attacks or natural disasters, and possible preventative measures and business continuity planning. Work in this area will be taken forward in a number of ways including: consideration of a joint co-operation plan within Member Administrations; assessment and exchange of information on business continuity planning within Member Administrations; and acceptance and dissemination of a common set of best practice standards in business continuity/disaster recovery, particularly for small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro businesses.

Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages

The Welsh Assembly Government takes the lead in the indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages work sector. In recent months, the group has focussed on language transmission in the family, ICT and language courses for adults. These issues will be brought forward at a Ministerial meeting in Galway in October 2006. In addition, two sub groups have been established specifically to address issues relating to ICT and planning and linguistic considerations.

Tourism

Guernsey currently takes the lead on Tourism within the Council. The group has organised a number of successful seminars since the last Summit. Topics considered include Quality Standards, Training, Emerging Markets in Asia and Crisis Management. Work in the area of training involved the development of a new training programme which was piloted by Guernsey, and endorsed at a meeting in Jersey in September 2005. The resulting training programmes have been made available to all BIC Member Administrations and are available on the BIC website. It is proposed to hold a Ministerial meeting in the Autumn on challenges and opportunities presented by emerging markets.

Transport

Northern Ireland takes the lead within the Council on Transport issues. Work since the May 2005 Summit has focussed on Road Safety issues. At a Ministerial meeting in February 2006, there was an Exchange of Letters between Ireland and Britain on a proposed bilateral agreement on the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications. Ministers also tasked the working group to prepare terms of reference for a report on the practical feasibility of co-operation between the two jurisdictions on lesser road traffic offences. In addition, it was agreed that work in the period ahead would include promoting Sustainable Travel and Accessible Transport Strategies.

Social Inclusion

The Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government jointly lead on the Council's work in relation to Social Inclusion. A report on work carried out by the group on disability and access to employment, education and training was presented to a meeting of Social Inclusion Ministers in Scotland in March 2006. The Ministerial meeting agreed that the next topic for consideration by the BIC would be Child Poverty, with a particular focus on lone parents. Work in this area has already begun and will continue with a view to a Ministerial meeting in late 2007.

New work area – Demography

The Scottish Executive has proposed a new priority work area for the BIC – Demography. The Council agreed that demographic issues, such as attitudes to ageing and migration strategies, present significant challenges for BIC Member Administrations and that there is much to be gained from sharing experience, information and approaches to them.

The Council approved the proposal to adopt Demography as a new work area, to be led by Scotland.

British-Irish Council

2 June 2006

www.British-IrishCouncil.org

List of Delegates

<u>British Government</u>	
Deputy Prime Minister	Rt Hon John Prescott MP
Minister of State for Climate Change & Environment	Mr. Ian Pearson MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Rt Hon Peter Hain MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at Northern Ireland Office	Mr. David Cairns MP

<u>Irish Government</u>	
Minister for Foreign Affairs	Mr. Dermot Ahern TD
Minister for Environment, Heritage & Local Government	Mr. Dick Roche TD

<u>Scottish Executive</u>	
Deputy First Minister	Mr. Nicol Stephen MSP

Minister for Environment & Rural Development	Mr. Ross Finnie MSP
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<u>Welsh Assembly Government</u>	
Minister for Environment, Planning & Countryside	Mr. Carwyn Jones AM

<u>Jersey</u>	
Chief Minister	Senator Frank Walker
Minister for Planning & Environment	Senator Frederick Cohen

<u>Guernsey</u>	
Chief Minister	Deputy Laurie Morgan
Deputy Chief Minister & Minister for Environment	Deputy Bernard Flouquet

<u>Government of the Isle of Man</u>	
Chief Minister	Hon Donald Gelling MLC
Minister for Local Government & Environment	John Rimington MHK

