

Written Statement by Peter Hain, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, on the Eighth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC), House of Commons, (1 February 2005)

"I have received the Eighth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC). This report has been made under Articles 4 and 7 of the International Agreement that established the Commission and it reports on levels of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland. I have considered the content of the report and I am today bringing it before Parliament. I have placed copies in the Library of the House.

The IMC has confirmed that PIRA paramilitary activity has ceased since 28 July.

Also the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) has today confirmed its position on the decommissioning of PIRA arms.

In its Report, the IMC say that "We are of the firm view that the present Provisional IRA (PIRA) leadership has taken the strategic decision to end the armed campaign and pursue the political course which it has publicly articulated."

"We see a number of definite signs of the organisation moving in the direction indicated in the statement" [of 28 July 2005

Compared to where PIRA stood only a few years ago, there has been a sea-change.

This is a positive report which shows that the IRA is moving in the right direction and is closing down: no murders, no recruitment and no bank robberies.

Of course the Report does not paint a picture of perfection and the Government did not expect it to.

While the report shows that there have been significant changes in IRA criminal activity with some criminal operations being closed down nevertheless, any on-going criminal activity is unacceptable and the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Assets Recovery Agency will continue to bear down it.

In addition, the IMC draws attention to the activities by loyalists. The Commissioners acknowledge the work of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Political Research Group (UPRG) to move things in "a better direction and in efforts to influence the Ulster Defence Association (UDA).

Loyalist paramilitary activity and criminality as described in this report must come to an end.

The IMC concludes that the financial sanctions against Sinn Fein and the PUP should not continue.

More can and should be done to speed up the process of bringing loyalist paramilitary activity and criminality to an end and remaining PIRA activities should cease.

The Government believes that after this Report of significant progress by IRA, there is every basis for proceeding with political discussions on re-establishing the Assembly. Once again, I am grateful to the Commission for their submission of this report and for its careful analysis."