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NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

26 March 1991

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, THE RT HON
PETER BROOKE MP

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to be able to inform the House that, following extensive discussions with the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland (the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party) and with the Irish Government, a basis for formal political talks now exists. I frankly acknowledge to the House that this would not have been possible without the goodwill and determination of the Northern Ireland parties and the helpful and constructive approach taken by the Irish Government. The stated positions of all these parties are well known. Her Majesty's Government reaffirms its position that Northern Ireland's present status as a part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people.

The endeavour on which we have all agreed to embark is an ambitious one. We are setting out to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands. While a successful outcome cannot be guaranteed in advance, I am confident that all the potential participants are committed to a forward-looking and constructive approach. For their part, the two signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement - the British and Irish Governments - have

made clear that they would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based agreement or structure if such an arrangement can be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all of the parties concerned.

To allow an opportunity for such a wider political dialogue the two Governments have agreed not to hold a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference between two pre-specified dates. All of the parties concerned will make use of this interval for intensive discussions to seek the new and more broadly based agreement which I have just described.

As the Conference will not be meeting between the specified dates the Secretariat at Maryfield will accordingly not be required for that period to discharge its normal role of servicing Conference meetings provided for in Article 3 of the Agreement.

It is accepted that discussions must focus on three main relationships: those within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; among the people of the island of Ireland; and between the two Governments. It is common ground between all the parties that hope of achieving a new and more broadly based agreement rests on finding a way to give adequate expression to the totality of the relationships I have mentioned.

Talks will accordingly take place in three strands corresponding respectively to the three relationships. Some arrangement will be needed for liaison between the different strands of these complex discussions. All the Northern Ireland parties will participate actively and directly in the North-South discussions. The Unionist parties have made clear that they wish their participation in those talks to be formally associated with my presence and that they will regard themselves as members of the United Kingdom team.

It is accepted by all those involved that, so as to make full use of the interval between meetings of the Conference to achieve an overall agreement satisfactory to all, it will be necessary to have launched all three sets of discussions within weeks of each other.

A first step towards getting related discussions under way in all three strands will be the opening, as soon as possible, of substantive talks between the parties in Northern Ireland under my chairmanship. These will commence with a round of bilateral meetings before moving on, as soon as possible, into plenary sessions. It has been agreed by all the participants that before long, when, after consultation, I judge that an appropriate point has been reached, I will propose formally that the other two strands should be launched. My judgement as to timing will be governed by the fact that all involved have agreed that the three sets of discussions will be under way within weeks of each other.

The internal talks, like the talks in the other strands, will follow a demanding and intensive schedule. In order to ensure a full airing of the issues, it will be open to each of the parties to raise any aspect of these relationships including constitutional issues, or any other matter which it considers relevant. All concerned have assured me that they will participate in good faith and will make every effort to achieve progress.

It is accepted by all the parties that nothing will be finally agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole and that confidentiality will be maintained thereunto. However, in the final analysis the outcome will need to be acceptable to the people.

POSSIBLE AGENDA FOR STRAND 2

1. Chairman's opening statement
2. Report from Chairman of Strand 1
3. Approval of agenda
4. Opening presentations (to be delivered and tabled by the two Governments and the four political parties)
5. Responses to opening presentations
6. Fundamental aspects of the problem: underlying realities; identity; allegiance; constitutional
7. Common interests (including matters such as economic cooperation and development, security cooperation and law enforcement) and themes
8. Other requirements to address problem
9. Possible institutional arrangements to meet the requirements (including principles to govern any such arrangements)
10. Relationship of any new institutional arrangements to other structures, including the EC
11. Consequential measures needed to implement new structures
12. Consideration of how an overall agreement might be endorsed
13. Matters referred for consideration to Strand 3
14. Approval of conclusions and closing statements

JOINT TALKS STATEMENT

The Talks participants have agreed the following statement:

Talks delegations today held a plenary session at the end of a process that began in Strand 1 on 9 March, continued in Strand 2 from 6 July and in Strand 3, which opened on 28 July. The last four weeks of the process were spent in informal bilateral consultations among delegations and between individual delegations and the Chairman. The Talks covered fundamental aspects of the internal, North/South and East/West relationships.

The Talks were based on the statement of the then Secretary of State, Peter Brooke, of 26 March 1991. This statement recorded that all parties accepted that nothing would be finally agreed in any of the three strands of the Talks until everything was agreed in the Talks as a whole. The Talks have not resulted in a comprehensive accommodation in relation to the deep seated and long standing problems they have been addressing.

The Talks have been held, as the statement of 26 March 1991 envisaged, during a period between meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference arranged for that purpose. Since the next meeting of the Conference has been set by the two Governments for 16 November the present Talks now come to an end.

The Chairman expressed the view that this should not mean that discussions would be brought permanently to an end. All concerned had set themselves ambitious objectives on entering the 3-strand process. Those objectives had not yet been achieved, despite the good will and intense effort all parties had put into the negotiations. However those objectives continued to be valid and, in the view of the Chairman, achievable.

The Talks participants noted that, while at this time there was no basis to agree a settlement, they had identified and

discussed most, if not all, of the elements which would comprise an eventual settlement; they had developed a clear understanding of each other's positions and established constructive dialogue on ways in which an accommodation might be reached on some of the key issues which divide them.

All parties recognise the value of the dialogue, but unsurprisingly, point to different areas of the process as being the most beneficial and identify different issues as being key obstacles. Participants have been acutely aware of the unprecedented - some might say historic - nature of the process in which they have engaged. All regret that their efforts have not been blessed with greater agreement. The two Governments are of the view that further dialogue is both necessary and desirable. The four Northern Ireland parties agree and, accordingly, will enter into informal consultations with a view to seeking a way forward.

The Strand 2 Talks participants wish to record their deep gratitude to Sir Ninian Stephen for his dedicated role in chairing this Strand of the process. They also thank the Australian Government for agreeing to make Sir Ninian available for this task and providing a senior official, Mr George Thompson, to support him in this role. The Strand 1 Talks participants also wish to extend their appreciation and thanks to Sir Patrick Mayhew MP for his chairmanship of the Strand 1 plenary meetings and to Jeremy Hanley MP for his commitment while chairing extensive Strand 1 committee sessions.

Participants also wish to put on record their gratitude to the administrative staff and all others who provided support services throughout the Talks process.

10 NOVEMBER 1992

STATEMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT

The Government have worked intensively over the past six months for a successful outcome to the Talks on the future of Northern Ireland.

Our commitment to this process and to the achievement of its objectives is undiminished by the ending of the present phase of negotiations.

We are determined to work for the resumption at the earliest possible date of a process of dialogue involving the two Governments and the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. We shall play an active role in the process of informal consultations aimed at finding the way forward.

We remain dedicated to the pursuit of a lasting settlement which will accommodate the two traditions in Ireland on equal terms and will bring about a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands.

The dialogue and negotiations which have taken place this year have been unprecedented in their scope and importance. For the first time in seventy years, Irish Government Ministers have engaged in a direct and sustained dialogue with Unionist leaders. This process has already accomplished the first essential condition for progress: It has enabled each of the main traditions in Ireland to define for the other the full dimensions of the sincerely held positions which must be reconciled in any lasting settlement, and to accept that new political arrangements must give expression to the identity and validity of each tradition. Future efforts must now be directed at securing agreement on how this can best be achieved.

The Government believe that these very tangible gains, and the considerable body of work already done, offer a promising foundation for the early resumption of negotiations. The intervening period might be availed of by all participants for the informal consultation envisaged in the concluding statement, and for further internal preparation.

We share the conviction expressed by the independent Chairman, Sir Ninian Stephen, that the objectives set in the Talks process are achievable. We hope that all participants will find it possible to cooperate in a constructive endeavour to resume the necessary process of negotiation, building on the experience and insights gained in the Talks, so as to secure a fair, honourable and durable accommodation in the interests of all the people of Ireland.