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IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER - MR. DAVID ANDREWS - PC - DUBLIN -
6 MARCH 1992

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FROM JAMES LEE FOR COI RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICES

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE

GIVEN BY THE IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER, MR. DAVID ANDREWS,

IN DUBLIN

ON FRIDAY, 6 MARCH 1992

*Mr Mc Carthy
10.3.92
913*

MR. ANDREWS:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to see you. I will make a short statement before I take questions because I know you will be anxious to get from me as much as you can in the context of the conference we had this morning and this afternoon.

*2 lines
stop*
I would particularly like to welcome my colleagues, Mary O'Rourke and Forick Sinn (phon). Forick and Mary were with me during the currency of the conference and Desmond O'Malley was there for discussions on north/south trade and other related matters but I must say that for my part, in my first conference I thought that the general tone and the general trend of the talks was excellent. I believe that the conference itself was successful and you will have read, of course, the communique which basically deals with what went on at the conference. It dealt with a wide range of important issues and our discussions were valuable and productive.

Our agenda included the resumption of the talks process, the current security situation and a number of issues relating to confidence in the security forces and the scope for increased north/south cooperation in various economic sectors. On this latter point, we were very pleased that Ministers O'Malley and Needham were able to join us continuing the pattern of conference discussions in this area with the relevant Ministers present.

As regards the round-table talks, the Secretary of State and I naturally welcomed the indication from the party leaders this week that they see no obstacles to talks resuming as soon as possible. We have agreed, therefore, that a gap to facilitate the talks will commence today and will last until whenever the British Prime Minister announces the date for the general election. The communique sets out clearly the basis on which talks will now resume.

On behalf of the Irish Government, I am very pleased that it has proved possible to relaunch the process of round-table talks and I look forward to serious and wide-ranging negotiations in each of the three strands which constitute this process.

We reviewed the security situation in Northern Ireland and our ongoing security cooperation. I took the opportunity to express the Government's dismay at the heavy loss of life in recent weeks. On the Nelson case, I reiterated and restated our concern on various aspects of the case. I underlined the need to ensure that

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such events should not recur and that whatever action is required in respect of those who committed offences, such action be taken.

We also discussed a range of other confidence issues, including accompaniment, the use of lethal force, the situation in the prisons in the light of Lord ^{Culver} Culver's most recent report. The closure of Crossport (phon) and the patrolling on Carlingford Loch.

This afternoon, with Ministers O'Malley and Needham, we had a very useful discussion of the prospects for north/south trade and the implications of the advent of the European single market. We also reviewed the current cooperation on energy and tourism and we discussed the prospects for the upgrading of the Dublin-Belfast rail link and I would like to say that a special tribute was paid to the peace train which went up to Belfast recently and condemnation was expressed at the efforts made to disrupt the contact between those who went in the train from Dublin to Belfast and gratitude was expressed that so many people took the opportunity to go and meet with the citizens of Belfast and their visit was very warmly appreciated and welcomed.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

QUESTION:

Minister, just how optimistic are you that the talks that are scheduled provisionally for next week can achieve anything given the timetable?

MR. ANDREWS:

I think they are fundamental to the process that we are trying to achieve in the first strand of the three strands of talks and I think they are fundamental to the achievement of resolution finally in the whole area where we seek to achieve resolution.

QUESTION:

Some people in Northern Ireland have expressed scepticism about the timing of the talks and have suggested that they have more to do with the electoral aspirations of some of the participants. You wouldn't share that?

MR. ANDREWS:

No, I wouldn't. I would have thought that that was an unfair reflection on the four party leaders. I think that we must welcome their efforts to achieve a renewal of the talks and I think it is unfair to be critical of them in regard to what they seek to achieve.

QUESTION:

Was there any discussion or any reservation on the Irish side about the proposal to suspend the conference?

MR. ANDREWS:

Absolutely not. We welcomed it 100%. We had no problem at all. There was no difference in relation to the first strand of talks which will take place before the next British general election which may happen in the future near or distant.

QUESTION:

How much concern did you express over the Nelson case?

MR. ANDREWS:

I expressed very serious concerns about the Nelson case. I raised the issue myself. The Northern Ireland Secretary, on the other hand, indicated that he was continuing his investigations into the issues which arose as a result of the decision where Nelson received a 10-year sentence arising from very serious crimes with which he was charged and of which he was found guilty and altogether what was indicated was that information in relation to ongoing enquiries in relation to those people who were involved in the Nelson case would be brought to the attention of the next conference whenever that might be.

QUESTION:

(inaudible...re British Executive being actively involved in killing or party to killing of visitors in Northern Ireland)

MR. ANDREWS:

I would suppose there is a certain feeling amongst a certain section of the community, more particularly arising out of the case raised by Mr. Glennon, the Nelson case. That raises very serious question in relation to the matter that you have raised and we discussed those issues in the context of the fact that the Nelson case was placed on the agenda by myself to indicate the concern of the Government as to what happened.

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

MR. ANDREWS:

I don't believe for one moment that the State are deliberately, as you suggest, engaging in that sort of covert activity. I don't accept that that is the situation.

QUESTION:

Did you say anything about Coal Island?

MR. ANDREWS:

Yes, I did. He said that the investigations into the Coal Island incident had yet to be completed and that he would again return to me at the next conference in relation to whatever findings there were.

QUESTION:

If you go back to 1987, 1989, 1992, there is a recurring pattern, a recurring theme. Isn't that a worrying aspect from your point of view given the ongoing conference?

MR. ANDREWS:

Yes, I agree with you. I think in any shoot-to-kill policy, as you suggest, an ongoing concern would have to be expressed in that regard by any government intent on doing its job properly.

QUESTION:

To come back ^{to} the talks, for how long would you be prepared to allow the gap after the British election to accommodate the first strand?

MR. ANDREWS:

This would be a matter that would be discussed when the conference meets again within a reasonable period of time after the British general election.

QUESTION:

Who is going to pay for the operating of the Dublin-Belfast line?

MR. ANDREWS:

A very interesting question because Mr. *Neaham?* himself was very anxious to have a resolution. He has been very keen on this as indeed have our own government and as far as funding is concerned, I understand that the EC will be approached in that regard but certainly there is a very strong push from both Dublin and Belfast to have this particular rail link completed as soon as and as urgently as possible.

QUESTION:

If after the Westminster election we have a hung Parliament, what are the implications for the talks process if there is horse-trading going on?

MR. ANDREWS:

I don't think there is any question of horse-trading or intended horse-trading because as you know both myself and my good friend the Minister for Justice here in the company of the Taoiseach met with Mr. Major on the one hand and he indicated there would be no question of horse-trading and the following morning we met again, led by the Taoiseach, with the Labour Leader, Mr. Neil Kinnock, and he gave us a similar undertaking that no such horse-trading would be sought or any efforts made in that regard.

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

MR. ANDREWS:

The reality of the situation is that he indicated that there would be no question of entering into pacts but I would have thought that Mr. Major, in the circumstances of his position presently, would accept that he would be going into the election as a strong leader and he would not have to do any deals with anybody.

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

MR. ANDREWS:

Many things have happened in the past. We are talking about the future and we look forward to that future with great hope and confidence, Mr. O'Malley.

QUESTION:

The Irish Government seems to have made an issue of the Government of Ireland 1920 Act issue. Mr. Brooke doesn't seem to agree that it is an issue any more. Do you believe it is going to be an issue in the future?

MR. ANDREWS:

What Mr. Brooke said maybe in response to a question from your goodself was that the 1920 Act wasn't discussed at today's conference but as has already been indicated by the Taoiseach and indeed by myself and others, in the second strand of the three strands of talks both that and other issues will be on the table for discussion. The totality of relationships between all the strands would be up for discussion.

QUESTION:

At the end of all your three-strand problems, it would have to be pretty good in a plebiscite north and south and be coupled to that for once and for all.... Ian Paisley last night nailed this and he said that under no circumstances would the people of Northern Ireland tolerate any plebiscite of the Republic of Ireland regarding their future. Do you think that would pose a major problem for you in trying to get a resolution of the problem?

MR. ANDREWS:

No, I don't think so at all. I think that John Hulme's scenario is a point of view and I believe that at the end of the day that we should seek to achieve an all-Ireland plebiscite and side-line the men of violence once and for all by indicating the totality and will of the people of the whole island of Ireland in relation to an anti-violence commitment or a commitment against violence.

QUESTION:

was internment mentioned at all today?

MR. ANDREWS:

No, internment wasn't raised. It wasn't on the agenda.

QUESTION:

Minister, how soon do you think strand two can begin realistically given the British election?

MR. ANDREWS:

The British election presumably will be called in the next few days and speculating that polling day will be 9 April, the inter-governmental conference would be held within a short period of time thereafter. The gap would then be agreed, the first strand would resume its particular talks and then there is a time-spell - hopefully a month, six weeks or two months - thereafter wherein the first strand would, as it were, pour into the beginning of the second strand of talks.

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

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MR. ANDREWS:

The sooner the better. I think that all parties, both north and south, would like to see the strands going apace side by side and towards a conclusion to the finality of the talks in the context of the Anglo-Irish governmental first strand of talks.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)