



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Group Two: Prospects for Political Progress

Speaking Points

Q1: What evidence, if any, is there that the peoples of Northern Ireland are more disposed than before to accept an historic compromise?

- A:
- I believe that one reason why the present Talks process is taking place is the realisation by political figures that there is a genuine yearning for peace.
 - After over twenty years of violence, it is clear that only an accommodation acceptable to and reflecting the aspirations of both traditions can heal the divisions and antagonisms.
 - It is the task of political leadership to use their authority and prestige in reaching an honourable accommodation that will be seen by people in both traditions as meeting their fundamental requirements.
 - The people of Northern Ireland have never been asked, by their political leadership, to accept a new framework agreed by all the constitutional parties. If that can be achieved in the Talks, I believe it will be accepted and welcomed by the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland and throughout the island.

Q2: Is it fallacious to believe that "whatever the negotiators agree on will be acceptable"?

- A:
- Any new arrangements agreed will have to be acceptable to the people of both traditions. That is understood and accepted by all participants in the Talks.
 - Acceptability, in such a context, also involves the durability and capacity of new structures to provide lasting peace and stability.
 - Lasting stability, as the new Ireland Forum concluded, can be found only in the context of new structures in which no tradition will be allowed to dominate the other, in which there will be equal rights and opportunities for all, and in which there will be provision for formal and effective guarantees for the protection of individual human rights and of the communal and cultural rights of both nationalists and unionists.
 - New arrangements must also provide structures and institutions, including security structures with which both nationalists and unionists can identify on the basis of political consensus; such arrangements must overcome alienation in Northern

Ireland and strengthen stability and security for all the people of Ireland.

Q3: Who really wants devolution (as opposed to local Government or shared authority), and why? In particular, who wants a devolved Government to have responsibility for the police?

A: - In Article 4(B) of the Agreement both Governments recognise that devolution can be achieved only with the co-operation of constitutional representatives within Northern Ireland.

- The nature of devolved arrangements is for agreement by the Northern Ireland parties. It is they who have to make the judgment regarding the extent of powers that should be devolved. Fundamentally, any new devolved arrangements must rest on acceptance throughout the community.

- It is clear that such institutions must meet certain criteria: capacity for growth and development; durability; acceptability.

Q4: What, if anything, can be done to ensure that any negotiated form of devolved Government would be stable?

A: - The only likely guarantee of stability is to ensure that both traditions are provided with full and clear expression of their identity and that new structures give satisfactory, secure and durable expression to both.

- There must also, in such a framework, be arrangements to help bridge the division in Ireland and bring both traditions together in an agreed institutional framework.

Q6: If the Agreement is to be transcended, what should be put in its place? In particular, should the status of Northern Ireland be defined in any new Agreement. If so, how?

A: - The Irish Government in accepting the basis for the Talks made clear that we would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based structure if such an arrangement can be arrived at through direct discussion or negotiation between all the parties concerned.

- Clearly, this should not involve any dismantling of the gains which have been made in the relationships between the two Governments. Equally, any new

structures must also be framed in the context of the recognition provided by the Agreement in relation to the legitimate aspirations of the nationalist community.

- The Agreement is a formal acceptance that the Irish Government have both a concern and a role in relation to Northern Ireland. Any new framework would have to be based on acceptance of this reality.

- As regards whether the status of Northern Ireland should be defined in any new Agreement, both Governments have affirmed in Article One of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. They recognise also that the present wish of a majority there is for no change in the status of Northern Ireland.

- This seems to me an emphatic and clear definition of the present position.

Group Two :

Question 5 : Is everyone in favour of a Bill of Rights? If so, which one?

See Group 1, Question 5