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Reference Code: 2021/96/2

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SINN FÉIN

SUBMISSION

TO

BRITISH
GOVERNMENT

9 DECEMBER 1994
STORMONT CASTLE
BELFAST

INTRODUCTION

Sinn Fein welcomes the resumption of discussions between your government and our party and we look forward to a positive engagement which we hope will move the present peace process forward. Sinn Fein enters these discussions on the basis of our electoral mandate. It is, of course, essential that Sinn Fein and our voters are accorded parity of esteem and equality of treatment. We hope, therefore, that this meeting marks the end of the discrimination to which we, as a party, and our electorate, have been subjected until now.

We believe that the political climate in which these talks occur could be significantly improved if your government responded positively to the need for a demilitarisation of the situation. An end to British military operations and the speedy release of all political prisoners, for example, would greatly assist the peace process. While such issues should not become preconditions to inclusive dialogue we would urge you to address them as a matter of urgency.

We regard these discussions as preliminary to the all party negotiations led by both the Dublin and the London governments, which is the essential next stage in the search for a lasting political settlement. It is therefore essential that we apply ourselves energetically to the completion of these preliminary discussions and move quickly to inclusive peace talks. We are confident that we can do so within a matter of weeks.

These talks are, in themselves, an historic development and reflect the unprecedented opportunity which has now been created to resolve the age-old conflict between Britain and Ireland and to build a lasting peace based on democratic principles. As democrats we believe that this settlement should be based on the fundamental right of the Irish people to national self-determination. As Irish republicans we seek an end to British jurisdiction in our country.

Notwithstanding the many obvious political differences between us, I am sure you will agree that dialogue offers us the best hope of moving forward. We will, therefore, address these discussions and the all party talks which follow on from these, in a constructive, responsible and determined manner.

1. We welcome this dialogue and hope it can help create a healing process which both removes the causes and addresses the consequences of the conflict. Everyone shares the responsibility to work to bring about a real and lasting peace in Ireland. Republicans are not reluctant to face up to our responsibility in this as has been evidenced by the initiatives we have taken, both unilaterally and with others in Ireland, to advance the search for a lasting peace. The courageous initiative taken by the leadership of the Irish Republican Army on August 31 is, of course, most significant and has created the best opportunity since partition to achieve a political settlement. The British Government clearly has the power and the major responsibility to initiate the necessary process of negotiations to move us in this direction.

2. Our long-standing position has been one of willingness to enter into dialogue with a view to resolving the conflict. In all of this we do not seek to impose pre-conditions nor should pre-conditions be imposed on us.

2.1. Inclusive dialogue and negotiations are necessary and inevitable if this conflict is to be resolved on a democratic basis. Pre-conditions represent obstacles to peace. They are a distraction from and a barrier to the necessary negotiations.

2.2. Moreover, after more than two decades of conflict and political impasse, we hold as self-evident the view that democratic, political and practical imperatives clearly require the open involvement and inclusion of all political views if a democratic resolution is to be sought and achieved. Democratic reasons clearly determine that Sinn Fein's right to represent its electorate and to promote its analysis should be accepted and acted upon, immediately and publicly. This is the basis upon which we enter into dialogue.

3. The re-opening of bilateral discussions between Sinn Fein and the British Government should be a prelude to inclusive negotiations which can address in a comprehensive fashion all the issues which have given rise to conflict and division in Ireland. In addition the bilateral discussion between Sinn Fein and the British Government must address the discrimination which Sinn Fein and our electorate have suffered as a result of the British Government's tactical refusal to recognise our democratic mandate. This discrimination must immediately be ended and Sinn Fein must be accorded equality of treatment with all other political parties.

4. Inclusive and all embracing peace talks led by the London and Dublin Government should be initiated as a matter of urgency. These negotiations, with an agreed timeframe, must address three broad areas:

- (a) Demilitarisation and associated issues.
- (b) Democratic rights for all Irish people, nationalist and unionist alike.
- (c) Political and constitutional change.

5. The route to peace in Ireland is to be found in the restoration to the Irish people of our right to national self-determination - in the free exercise of this right without impediment of any kind. Agreement on how that right is exercised is a matter for the Irish people alone to determine. The British Government should therefore introduce the measures to give legislative effect on their side to this right.

6. British sovereignty over the six-counties, as with all of Ireland before partition, is self-evidently the inherent cause of political instability and conflict. This must be addressed within the democratic context of the exercise of the right to national self-determination if the cause of instability and conflict is to be removed.

7. We seek to assist the establishment of, and to support, a process which, with due regard for the real difficulties involved, culminates in the exercise of that right and the end of your jurisdiction. This should, of course, be accomplished in the shortest possible time consistent with obtaining maximum consent to the process.

8. We believe that the wish of the majority of the Irish people is for Irish unity. We believe that an adherence to democratic principles makes Irish unity inevitable. The emerging political and economic imperatives both within Ireland and within the broader context of greater European political union support the logic of Irish unity. Since its creation 72 years ago, the six-county statelet has been in constant crisis. Its survival has always been dependant on the existence and exercise of repressive legislation, coercion and discrimination. Its existence lies at the heart of the present conflict and divisions, both in Ireland, and between Britain and Ireland.

8.1. It is our view therefore that the British Government should play a crucial and constructive role in persuading the unionist community to reach a democratic accommodation with the rest of the Irish people.

9. Your commitment to uphold the unionist veto is an attempt to pre-determine the out-come of negotiations. The consequence of upholding the veto is, in effect, to set as your objective the maintenance of partition and the six-county statelet and, consequently, the maintenance of the primary source of the conflict. If they are to be successful, inclusive negotiations must address all relevant issues without vetoes, without pre-conditions and without any attempt to pre-determine the out-come.

10. We recognise that the concerns of the unionist population about their position in an Irish national democracy must be addressed and resolved in a

concrete way, including legislation for all measures agreed in the course of a process of negotiations. This process of national reconciliation must secure the political, religious and democratic rights of the northern unionist population. That is not only the democratic norm but a practical necessity if we are to advance the cause of peace in Ireland and find a way out of the present impasse.

11. The most urgent issue facing the people of Ireland and Britain is the need for a genuine peace process which sets equality, justice and political stability as its objectives and, has as its means, dialogue and all-embracing negotiations in the context of democratic principles. In attempting to progress towards that position republicans have consistently demonstrated a willingness to be reasonable and flexible. We are convinced that if the political will exists then we can finally move away from conflict through the achievement of a democratic political settlement. The potentially historic opportunity which currently exists should not be lost.