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Report of meeting with Sinn Féin representatives,
13th September, 1994.

1. With Dr. Martin Mansergh, I met representatives of Sinn Féin in Government Buildings at 4p.m. on Tuesday, 13th September, 1994, to discuss the proposed Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. The Sinn Féin representatives were Mr. Tom Hartley, Chairman of the Party, Ms. Lucilita Breatnach, General Secretary and Ms. Anne Speed, member of the Árd-Chomhairle. The meeting lasted about one hour.
2. Dr. Mansergh briefly placed the proposal for a forum in its context in the Northern Ireland peace process and also referred to the Taoiseach's consultations with political parties, some of which had responded on the draft terms of reference and otherwise and others of which had yet to do so. Unlike the New Ireland Forum, which had been established by the participating parties, the new Forum would be set up by the Irish Government which would decide on the modalities, after listening to all concerned.
3. He requested the Sinn Féin representatives not to "hype up" the present meeting, about which some criticisms were already coming from Opposition parties. When the Taoiseach had met Messrs. Hume and Adams, there had not been an opportunity for any discussion of consequence about the Forum. The Government side would refer to this difference from the meetings with other parties, when responding to criticisms of today's meetings.
4. Ms. Speed said her side would present some general perceptions and then ask some specific questions. Sinn Féin had not yet drawn up its formal position on the Forum. It would do so and send in a submission in the following few days. In preparation for this, they might ask us today to explain certain formulations in the draft terms of reference.
5. First, she should say that their reaction to the proposed terms of reference was broadly positive. They were concerned that no additional preconditions, not now in the draft terms, should be imported into them. They had noted references to some such conditions in public statements by Fine Gael and some of these might be problematic for Sinn

Féin. Dr. Mansergh said that some parties wanted a reference to the Joint Declaration to be included in the terms. The Government had taken the position that the test of eligibility to participate was a complete cessation of violence and had not required people to sign up to the Declaration. They would not wish to impose a test of adherence to the Declaration. It might, however, be possible, without going so far, to find a way of referring to it, perhaps tangentially, in a way that might meet the wishes of the parties concerned. More generally the Government would not, broadly speaking, be in the business of adding further preconditions.

6. Ms. Speed referred to Deputy Bruton's concern that there should be every opportunity and encouragement for unionists to participate in the Forum and to his suggestion that the Forum might establish a formal link with the House of Commons Select Committee on Northern Ireland. This specific suggestion could be problematic for Sinn Féin, as this Committee was seen as the reward to the unionists for doing a special deal with John Major to support him. Dr. Mansergh considered that the suggestion in question did not make sense, in terms of encouraging unionist participation. One might perhaps, consider some not so formal link with the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body, although the unionists did not, at present, participate in this.
7. Mr. Hartley said that Sinn Féin consider it very important that the unionists should participate directly in the Forum. Dr. Mansergh said the Taoiseach had sent letters to the leaders of the Official Unionist, Democratic Unionist and Popular Unionist parties, conveying an invitation, in open, loose language, to participate, either at the outset or later, as members or in another manner. Mr. Hartley said that Sinn Féin do not want the Forum to be a focus for dissension.
8. Ms. Speed asked how would the Forum operate? Would it have a statutory basis? Would it seek submissions from bodies and persons other than political parties? To whom would it report - the Dáil, the Government or whom? Would it be a continuing body? Dr. Mansergh and Mr. Kirwan referred to relevant aspects of how the New Ireland Forum had operated. The Government had yet to take decisions on these matters but the

previous Forum offered some experience which could be drawn on. Mr. Kirwan said that submissions could, of course, be sought from all comers but that some time would be lost while waiting for these to come in. In the present case, it might make sense, having regard to some of the purposes of the Forum, to directly request or commission presentations from groups that would be relevant to the purposes and would have something to offer or might even wish to get things off their chest. One thought, on the precedent of the Opsahl Commission, of bodies like community groups on the Falls Road: or, having regard to the desire and need to reassure unionists, to groups such as the unionist business group that had recently had a letter in the newspapers.

9. Dr. Mansergh and Mr. Kirwan said that it would not be necessary for the Forum to have a statutory basis. It would not necessarily report to any specific authority but to the world at large, if reports for publication could be agreed. The Forum was envisaged as a continuing body but perhaps with two phases - a more intensive phase in the interval before all - party talks on the basis of the Framework Document began and a later, less intensive phase - possibly meeting once a month, if talks were under way. On frequency of meetings in the intensive phase, the thinking was a plenary meeting once a week. It was clear that the Sinn Féin representatives would not be happy with any lesser frequency. We noted that the Forum itself could conceivably decide on a range of working methods, including use of committees but that experience with the New Ireland Forum suggested that other calls on members, parliamentary and otherwise, might make it impracticable to hold plenary and committee sessions in the same week.

10. Ms. Speed commented that Sinn Féin regarded the phrasing "as long as is necessary" in the terms of reference as a positive element. The Forum could act as a sounding board as regards input into the talks. She asked whether reports, conclusions etc. would be transmitted to the Government during the course of the Forum. Mr. Hartley said that there was a difference between the context in which this Forum would convene and that which applied at the time of the New Ireland Forum. They wished to understand what would be the relationship of the Forum to

action on such issues as prisoners and border roads. As these queries were teased out in discussion, it became clear that what was concerning Sinn Féin was that the Forum would not operate as a block or brake on steps outside of its operation that the Government might otherwise take i.e. that it would not operate as a vetting or censoring body. It was explained to them that the existence or operation of the Forum would not impinge on the prerogatives of the Government on such issues, on which the Forum would not normally be consulted.

11. Ms. Speed asked how the Forum's deliberations and work would feed into the talks process proper? How would the Forum relate to the Framework Document? Dr. Mansergh indicated that the expectation was that the Framework Document, which would be an agreement between two Governments, would be agreed and published before the Forum convened. The document would, however, relate to principles at a high level and would not tease these out in all their detail. This could perhaps be usefully done at the Forum, for example in regard to what, in detail, is involved in the principle of parity of esteem. The Framework Document should be thought of as a stimulus to discussion, not a restraint on such discussion. An analogy might be drawn from the National Economic and Social Forum which prepares and publishes reports on a range of economic and social issues, some of which are the subject of separate negotiations by the bodies, such as the ICTU, representative of the social partners. The new Forum would not be just a pre-negotiation chamber.

12. In reply to a question as to the latest thinking on representation of parties, Dr. Mansergh explained that this would be very broadly proportional to electoral support in elections, South and North and that Sinn Féin support in both parts of Ireland had been counted. However, Sinn Féin and other Northern parties would be given representation more favourable than these electoral results, alone, would support. The thinking was that the SDLP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party would, respectively, have 5, 3 and 2 full members, perhaps with as many again alternates. Among the smaller southern parties, the Progressive Democrats might have 2 members and the other smaller parties perhaps 1 each. For the independents including such

people as Senator Gordon Wilson, one might think of 1 full member, with 3 alternates. We had adverted to the question of smaller parties, including in the North and one possibly was to have an observer status. Another might be to set aside a day to allow them to make presentations, based on submissions.

13. Ms. Speed asked could there be provision for international presentations. Mr. Kirwan indicated that we had adverted, provisionally, to the idea of presentations by Irish - American business people on the investment potential following an agreed, peaceful settlement. Another possibility could be a presentation by or behalf of the European Commission on EU support for the North and for the peace process.
14. Ms. Speed asked about thinking as to who might take the Chair. In response, reference was made to desirable attributes of a good chairperson, including chairing and negotiating skills and familiarity with and understanding of the problems. If it were possible to identify a person with these qualities, who was reasonably sympathetic to the task in hand but who came originally from a unionist background, this could be helpful in encouraging unionist involvement. Ms. Speed indicated that Sinn Féin agreed with this view on the question of chairmanship.
15. Ms. Speed asked about links between the Secretariat of the Forum and officials who would be advising the Irish Government in regard to the talks process. As this was teased out, it became clear that the Sinn Féin concern was that the talks process and the Forum deliberations might go in opposite directions and be at cross-purposes to each other. Mr. Kirwan noted that the Government would be involved, at political level, in both processes and could be expected to use their best endeavours to ensure that there was congruence between the two processes. Dr. Mansergh said that, in addition, there was no question of an absence of the desirable contacts between the Forum Secretariat and officials concerned with talks.
16. On the Secretariat, Dr. Mansergh and Mr. Kirwan, explained that no

decisions had yet been taken as to its composition. Reference was made to the larger number of parties, compared to the New Ireland Forum and it was suggested that for its smooth operation, there could be advantage in having it drawn from the public services, South and if possible, North and including the Services of the European Commission. It was appreciated that Sinn Féin might not be able to or wish to identify persons within the main civil service streams who were understanding of their viewpoints. Perhaps, Sinn Féin could identify persons in the wider public service in the North, such as social workers active with community groups, that they could suggest for inclusion in the Secretariat. The Sinn Féin representatives showed no sign of demurring from the idea of a public services Secretariat - but neither did they explicitly accept it.

17. Ms. Speed asked whether the Government side had considered the question of research assistance for the participating parties. In response, we referred to the precedent of the New Ireland Forum where each party delegation had an aide or secretary, financed from public funds. Mr. Kirwan also referred to the possibility of the Forum, as a body, engaging, from the outset, economic consultants, perhaps a partnership of two firms, one from the North and one from the South. Ms. Speed asked who would take decisions about such matters as whom to employ for research assistance. Mr. Kirwan said that if precedent was followed, it would be the Forum as a body, although on the previous occasion, the Secretariat was involved in obtaining tenders and in assessing these.
18. Dr. Mansergh referred to the question of how to steer the operations of the Forum. In the case of the New Ireland Forum there had been a Steering Group, composed of the Chairman and the 4 Party Leaders. With the larger number of parties now in prospect, this might be unwieldy. If one thought this so, another option might be to have a group, analogous to the Whips in parliaments, who would discuss and reach agreement on the business to be transacted by the Forum.
19. Ms. Speed asked what would now be the process for actually reaching decisions on the conduct of the Forum? Dr. Mansergh explained that ultimately this would be for Government decision but that every effort

would be made to secure the maximum possible consensus. Ms. Breatnach enquired as to how the process of settling terms of reference would be brought to a conclusion. Dr. Mansergh foresaw two possible scenarios. In the first, there would be sufficient convergence between the responses from the different parties to allow the Government to take decisions with a high degree of confidence that these would command broad agreement, subject to adjustments at the margins. The alternative possibility was that one or more further rounds of contacts with the parties would be required. Ultimately, the Taoiseach would write to parties inviting participation on the basis of terms of reference he would enclose and, perhaps, papers on other aspects of running the Forum.

20. Ms. Speed asked what venue was envisaged. Dr. Mansergh and Mr. Kirwan indicated that Dublin Castle was in mind: where there would depend on eventual decisions as to numbers of members and alternates. Sinn Féin asked about the possibility of meetings in the North. The response was that this had been given initial consideration. In the early days of a Forum in which unionists chose not to participate, it might be seen as seeking "to get up their nose" to go North. Later, however, when the Forum had been able to build some confidence in its intentions and operation, it might be possible to have an environment in which one or more meetings in the North could be perceived in a positive light.
21. Ms. Speed asked could simultaneous translation facilities be provided: from a cultural standpoint, much of their membership would see the ability to use the Irish language as important. Mr. Kirwan replied that the technology for simultaneous interpretation was already in place in Dublin Castle. As regards interpreters, there was already a staff attached to Leinster House. Their availability could be established and, in general, the Government would no doubt be anxious to meet Sinn Féin on this matter.
22. Following reference to the question of a verbatim record of proceedings, it became clear that the main concern of Sinn Féin was that proceedings of public sessions should be published.

23. Ms. Speed gave her business and home telephone numbers to Mr. Kirwan. The Sinn Féin representatives, before leaving the building, showed us the statement they proposed to issues to the media and to adhere to in responding to reporters' questions. This statement was low-key and presented no problems. Subsequent coverage on T.V. news seemed to show that they had adhered to the pre-prepared lines.



Walter P. Kirwan,
Assistant Secretary.

16th September, 1994.