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**Immediate**

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cc PSS Flinley  
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10 May 1995

PAGES: 3 + 14

TO: HQ

FROM: BELFAST

FOR: Pat Hennessey/David Donoghue

FROM: Sean Farrell

**Ministerial Meeting with Sinn Fein**

1. I have already sent to you the Press Release issued by the British side after today's meeting with Sinn Fein. What follows is based on a briefing given by Martin Williams to Mr Mellett and me (who did not, of course, attend the meeting). I am appending to this the British Paper on the Modalities of Decommissioning mentioned in the third paragraph of the Press Release, together with the Sinn Fein opening statement and their paper on "Demilitarising Society".
2. Williams told us that he understood that, at the specific request of No 10, Quentin Thomas had telephoned Frank Murray after the meeting to brief him on what had occurred. Williams also suggested that, since the British team at the Liaison Group tomorrow would include 3 of those at today's meeting, it would be possible to expand on the detail he was giving at tomorrow's meeting.
3. The Press Release was not shown to Sinn Fein for approval by them. According to Williams this was simply because there was not enough time to get it finished. Sinn Fein, were however, given a copy of it at the conclusion of the meeting.
4. The Sinn Fein delegation was comprised of the usual group. The British delegation was similar to that which has attended previous meetings of the exploratory dialogue with, of course the addition of Michael Ancram.
5. The meeting started with handshakes. Both sides then agreed that they would make their opening statements and then discuss how to proceed further. McGuinness made clear that he was very keen to go first and Ancram acquiesced.
6. The Sinn Fein opening statement was in tone and content much as the British side had expected. It contained no problems or surprises. The British side did not seek to take up any of the points mentioned but rather Ancram responded with the British opening statement.
7. Quite a long discussion then ensued on how to proceed. Per Williams the discussion lasted 1 1/2 hours with plain speaking on both sides. Williams referred to one commentator who had spoken of each side presenting its case "in forthright terms" as being an accurate description. Ancram emphasised

the importance of the decommissioning item and the British position, which had been made quite clear, that it should be taken first. McGuinness stressed the importance of equality of treatment being accorded to Sinn Fein and suggested that the British Government was lacking in the political will to grant that equality. Williams mentioned that the British side quoted the Taoiseach's comments in the Dail in support of their position. Sinn Fein pointed to the fact that the Taoiseach had been willing to meet with Sinn Fein.

8. Eventually, after lengthy discussion, Ancram insisted, and Sinn Fein acquiesced, that decommissioning be discussed first. McGuinness used the formula that he would:

- (a) listen to the British points;
- (b) think about them; and
- (c) speak to those who have the guns.

9. The British then tabled their paper, which they have now supplied to us on a confidential basis. Williams mentioned that they haven't actually published the paper, though the rubric worked out with Sinn Fein, that papers are confidential only if both sides agree (the opposite to that worked out with the Loyalists) would allow it.

10. Following these exchanges there was a recess.

11. After the recess Sinn Fein raised the issues of equality of treatment for Sinn Fein, demilitarisation and prisons. With regard to equality of treatment, Sinn Fein made their points along familiar lines. Nothing new was adduced in their presentation. They made their points about demilitarisation along the lines set out in the paper which they handed over. On prisons Sinn Fein stated that they wished to raise a number of issues. The British agreed that prisons issues were important, but suggested that they were best dealt with at another meeting.

12. In response to the Sinn Fein points on equality of treatment, the British side stated that they would be willing to say that requests from Sinn Fein for meetings with Ministers on ordinary Government business would be considered on their merits, which was similar to the line taken with other political parties. Sinn Fein responded by asking whether this meant that Sinn Fein would be dealt with on the same basis as other parties in matters relating to political developments. They asked for a meeting between Gerry Adams and the Secretary of State.

13. The British in reply stressed that the talks were still in the phase of "exploratory dialogue". They stressed that there was a need to make progress on a number of items, including decommissioning, before the talks could proceed to

another level. They made clear to Sinn Fein that they would not be dealt with on the same basis as other parties, where political matters were concerned, until that progress had been achieved. However, the British repeated that, for the normal business of Government, they would treat requests from Sinn Fein for meetings with Ministers and officials on their merits, which was treatment similar to that accorded other parties.

14. A second recess then took place (Williams did not know whether this was at Sinn Fein's request).

15. After resumption, the British offered three dates next week for a subsequent meeting. Sinn Fein's response was that they did not want to agree to a date for a further meeting. Both sides repeated their positions regarding equality of treatment (Sinn Fein) and that this was exploratory dialogue (British side). The issue was left that Sinn Fein would consider the matter of another meeting further. In this regard you will note that the final paragraph of the British Press Release could be read as meaning that Sinn Fein had agreed to consider dates, whereas in fact what they agreed to consider was the holding of another meeting. These matters rest, though Williams was careful to make clear that, if Sinn Fein did not come back, the British would probably contact them after a reasonable period to enquire what their intentions were.

16. Williams added that the British side gave a hint to Sinn Fein that it saw no reason why the composition of its delegation in the exploratory dialogue could not be changed. He emphasised that they had been careful not to convey the impression that Mayhew would attend a meeting in the exploratory dialogue phase but had hinted that he was not excluded from doing so. Presumably Sinn Fein registered the point though they didn't evidence any interest in it at the meeting. Williams added that the attendance of Mayhew at such a meeting, even under the circumstances hinted at, could cause political difficulties.

17. Williams also drew our attention to the phrase in the 5th paragraph of the Press Release (in the last sentence) "on the basis that the dialogue would continue". It had been made clear to Sinn Fein that the British offer with regard to other meetings was on the basis that the exploratory dialogue was continuing. Williams reminded us that, as of now, no fresh meeting has been agreed.

18. The British assessment of the meeting was that it had been hard going. The Press Statement had sought to put a positive slant on the exchanges but there had been no amicability or harmony as witness the fact that a further meeting has not been arranged.

[Paper given to Sinn Fein on 10 May 1995.]

#### MODALITIES OF DECOMMISSIONING ARMS: PAPER BY THE GOVERNMENT SIDE

1. During an initial exchange with Sinn Fein on 7 February on arms decommissioning, the Government side read out a paper listing some of the practical issues on which, in its view, it would be valuable to reach an understanding through future exchanges. These included possible methods of decommissioning; verification/ validation arrangements; practical considerations; legal issues; and possible phasing. The paper stressed the need for early progress on decommissioning, noting that, while this did not mean that comprehensive decommissioning had to take place immediately, it did involve a willingness in principle to disarm progressively, a common practical understanding of modalities, and the decommissioning of some arms to test practical arrangements and demonstrate good faith. That position has subsequently been repeated publicly by Ministers on a number of occasions.

2. The Government side is tabling this paper, which explores in more detail some of the practical aspects of decommissioning, to enable a further, and fuller, discussion of modalities.

#### Methods of Decommissioning

3. The Government has already made clear its willingness to be flexible about the mechanics of decommissioning, and to consider any workable proposals put to it. It envisages, however, that decommissioning will involve one or more of the following methods: direct transfer of arms to the authorities, North or South, for subsequent destruction; depositing arms for recovery and destruction; or the destruction of arms by those in possession of them.

#### Operation of Possible Scheme

4. The Government believes that, in the interests of consistency, even-handedness and openness, decommissioning would appropriately take place by means of a formally promulgated and widely publicised scheme it recognises, however, that less formal interim arrangements may be

needed at the outset of the decommissioning process. The same arrangements would apply to all groups or individuals who wished to decommission illegally-held arms. Complementary arrangements may be required on both sides of the border: this is an issue on which the two Governments are consulting closely.

5. For illustrative purposes, a decommissioning scheme might operate broadly along the following lines. Those wishing to hand over arms would be able to do so by first notifying the authorities, whether directly or through an intermediary; arrangements would then be made for the arms to be either collected or handed over at an agreed location. Alternatively, information on the whereabouts of arms could be passed, anonymously or otherwise, to the authorities, perhaps utilising a publicised telephone number; the authorities would then arrange for the recovery of the arms. All arms so recovered would be destroyed.

6. The destruction of arms by those currently in possession of them, while not an option which the Government would wish to rule out at this stage, raises a number of potentially significant practical and legal difficulties, including problems of verification and the risk to public safety. The Government could agree to proceed on this basis only if fully satisfied that these difficulties could be successfully and safely overcome.

#### Verification/Validation

7. The Government attaches considerable importance to the verification and validation of the decommissioning process. It recognises that third parties, such as community leaders or others, may have a role to play in any scheme, both in facilitating the recovery of arms and in verifying their subsequent disposal. The extent and nature of that involvement would depend on the method of decommissioning adopted. It has also been suggested that the involvement of third parties might be formalised through the establishment of a commission of some kind; the Government, while anxious to avoid over-elaborate arrangements, would be prepared to

consider this option if it were clear that such a step would materially assist the process of decommissioning. The precise role and composition of such a body would be for consideration in the light of the method of decommissioning employed.

8. For the reasons given above, the Government envisages that the destruction of illegal arms recovered by it under the scheme would be independently supervised.

#### Practical Considerations

9. It will be important that any scheme takes full account both of safety factors, in terms of avoiding risk to the public and of avoiding misunderstandings at the point of handover, and of the need to secure arms intended for decommissioning from misappropriation by others.

#### Legal Issues

10. A decommissioning scheme may need to be underpinned by specific legal arrangements in respect of those involved in decommissioning. Any such arrangements would be strictly defined and linked directly to the operation of the scheme: their purpose would be to facilitate the decommissioning process, and would not extend more widely. The precise scope of such measures would depend on the method of decommissioning adopted.

#### Phasing

11. The holding of illegal arms and the use of violence and threat of violence have no place in a peaceful, democratic society. As a matter both of principle and of political reality, substantial progress on the issue of decommissioning of arms is needed before Sinn Féin can or will be included in substantive multi-party talks. The most urgent requirement at this stage is to begin that process as soon as possible. The first step is to reach agreement on the three priorities identified in paragraph 1 above: a willingness in principle

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to disarm, a common practical understanding of the modalities, and to get decommissioning underway. This paper is intended to assist in that process.



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## Demilitarising Society

The most urgent and important issue facing us all is to remove the causes of conflict, overcome the legacy of history and to heal the divisions which have resulted; to achieve a lasting peace through a negotiated settlement.

Considerable progress has been made so far. This progress must be consolidated. Everyone concerned to achieve a lasting peace must apply themselves to this task, which can only be accomplished by dialogue; through inclusive discussions and negotiations, led by both governments and involving all parties with an electoral mandate. Everyone must be at the table and every issue must be on the table. If the peace process is to succeed in achieving a democratic agreement between the Irish people, all parties must be accorded equality of treatment and the democratic rights of all sections of the electorate must be upheld.

Sinn Féin, therefore, enters these discussions with the British government on the basis of our electoral mandate. It is essential that Sinn Féin, our voters and the nationalist community in general, are accorded equality of treatment.

As democrats, we in Sinn Féin, believe that a democratic and lasting settlement must be based on the fundamental right of the Irish people to national self-determination. As Irish republicans we believe that this must involve the ending of British jurisdiction in our country. We accept also that there are those who have a different view, a view which they will take to the negotiating table. But we welcome the widespread acceptance that an internal settlement is not a solution.

There are three main areas which need to be dealt with to consolidate the peace process. These are:

1. Constitutional and political change;
2. Demilitarisation;
3. Democratic rights.

In this context progress can be made on the whole range of relevant issues - justice, cultural and economic discrimination, prisoners, political and constitutional matters and demilitarisation. Demilitarisation requires movement on a range of issues including repressive legislation and the decommissioning of weapons on all sides.

An Taoiseach, Mr Bruton, has correctly stated that there cannot be a single issue agenda and the Tanaiste, Mr Spring, has pointed out that to make the decommissioning of weapons a precondition is 'a formula for disaster'. None of these issues should be made a precondition for further movement, nor should any issue be excluded from discussion.

Sinn Féin is wholly committed to the permanent removal of all guns from Irish politics. We have consistently underlined our desire to see a complete demilitarisation of the situation - that is the removal of repressive legislation, the release of all political prisoners, and the removal of all guns - British, unionist, loyalist and republican - from Irish politics. To bring about, in the words of the British government "the decommissioning" of all weapons of war. Without this commitment the peace process would not have been brought to its present position. The most important element in bringing the situation to this point, as is universally acknowledged, was the IRA's announcement of 31 August 1994.

Since its creation the 6 county statelet has survived only through repressive measures and emergency legislation. Over the past 25 years the situation has become increasingly militarised. It is unrealistic to talk about a viable peace process which does not involve demilitarisation.

To be effective, the peace process, therefore, needs to confront the reality that there are a large number of armed groups, British, loyalist and republican, involved in this conflict. As can be seen from the accompanying leaflet, there are approximately 16,000 members of the British army still involved in military operations. There are massive military encampments throughout the 6 county statelet. There are 13,000 heavily armed members of the RUC, a paramilitary force which has acted as the armed wing of unionism and which is totally unacceptable to the nationalist community. There are an approximate 120,000 licensed weapons, most of them in the hands of the unionist community. There are large stockpiles of weapons in the possession of loyalist paramilitaries, brought into the country through the combined efforts of the loyalists, Ulster Resistance and British intelligence. The IRA also holds large amounts of weapons. There is a myriad of repressive laws. There are hundred of prisoners in jail as a direct result of the conflict.

All of these aspects of militarisation are the symptoms of the political failures of the past. They need to be addressed and resolved as part of a political settlement if we are to have a lasting peace. The consequences of the conflict, of course, need to be dealt with, both as part of the peace process itself and as part of a wider healing process of national reconciliation. But the clear priority is to address and resolve the causes of conflict - the failed political policies and structures which led into conflict and to the militarisation which we are now seeking to redress.

It is our firm opinion, that of our electorate and, more generally, of the nationalist community throughout Ireland, that, as part of this process, the RUC needs to be disbanded and replaced by a police service which is acceptable and accountable to all our people. The British Army needs to be withdrawn. The consequences of the arming of the loyalist death squads by British military intelligence and of collusion with these death squads need to be dealt with. Prisoners need to be released.

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Repressive legislation needs to be repealed. All weapons, British, loyalist, unionist and republican need to be decommissioned. Peace is dependant on a lasting political settlement and this must include, of course, permanent demilitarisation and the removal of all guns from Irish politics.

Everyone has an influence over this situation. The collective application of that influence can transform the political climate and put an end to the failures of the past.

Sinn Féin's position on this matter is transparent. We wish to use our influence on all matters, in a positive way and with the aim of advancing the peace process. How we use our influence and how much influence we have is a matter of judgement for us.

Peace is not simply the absence of conflict. Rather it is the existence of conditions in which the causes of conflict have been eradicated and where justice, equality and democracy prevail; where agreed political structures and institutions are a substitute for political conflict; where diversity is recognised and democratically accommodated. This is the task which faces us all and the sooner we begin this work the sooner we can leave the divisions and mistrust of the past behind us.

10 May 1995

Sinn Féin welcomes the ending of the ban on ministerial contact with our party.

It is now 8 months since the IRA moved to enhance the opportunity for a lasting peace in Ireland by declaring a complete cessation of military operations. The response of your government, despite assurances of a flexible and imaginative response, has been begrudging, reluctant and clearly designed to slow the momentum of the peace process. Sinn Féin outlined to you the basis on which we would approach this meeting in early March. That is the basis on which we are meeting today. The attendant delay was therefore unnecessary and clearly tactical. We urge you now to leave this hesitant approach behind you, to adopt the imaginative and flexible approach promised and to move decisively into inclusive peace talks on the basis of equality.

We look forward, in this context, to a positive engagement with British government ministers. In our opening statement, "*Towards a Negotiated Settlement*" which marked the recommencement of dialogue between Sinn Féin and the British government on 9 December, we outlined the basis on which we approach these discussions. We refer you again to this document, a copy of which accompanies this statement. Sinn Féin enters these discussions on the basis of our electoral mandate.

We hope that this meeting finally marks the end of the discrimination to which we, as a party, and our electorate, have been subjected and that we can now move into inclusive peace talks on the basis of democratic principles and equality of treatment for all sections of the electorate.

Past and present structures have clearly failed to bring agreement among the Irish people on political structures. On the contrary they have contributed to continuing tragedy and suffering. There can be no return to these failures of the past - there can be no internal solution. A lasting political settlement agreed among all sections of the Irish people requires fundamental political and constitutional change.

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 believe that this must involve the ending of British jurisdiction in our country.

Sinn Féin has a clear understanding that agreement on political structures will only emerge from inclusive negotiations, led by both governments and involving the parties with an electoral mandate in Ireland. Both governments have an inescapable responsibility to facilitate such dialogue.

The announcement by An Taoiseach, John Bruton, that he will shortly invite all the parties in Ireland to engage with his government in bilateral talks is a welcome development and underlines the 'open door' approach of the Irish government to political dialogue. This, of course, will permit the parties to decide themselves at what point they would wish to join the talks. In contrast, the British government's policy up to the present has been to exploit existing difficulties in a transparent attempt to forestall progress towards inclusive political negotiations.

The most urgent and important issue facing us all is to remove the causes of conflict, to overcome the legacy of history and to heal the divisions which have resulted; to achieve a lasting peace through a negotiated settlement.

Such a settlement must, of course, be based on equality - political equality, economic equality and cultural equality. There is a need now for legislative and practical measures to ensure that the political and religious discrimination, which has characterised this statelet since its creation, is brought to an end. In political terms this means all political parties being treated equally. In economic terms it means effective fair employment legislation and measures. In cultural terms it means equality for the Irish language and identity, particularly in the fields of education and broadcasting. These rights are not and should not be dependant on the outcome of negotiations. They should be accorded to all the people of this island now on the basis of fundamental principles of justice and equality.

This meeting between Sinn Féin and the British government is, in itself, an historic development and reflects the unprecedented opportunity which has been created to resolve the age-old conflict between Britain and Ireland, to begin a process of national reconciliation in Ireland and to build a lasting peace based on democratic principles.

These are the core political issues which must all be addressed, with openness, flexibility and imagination, in inclusive negotiations if we are to turn the present potential for peace into a permanent reality.

There are three main areas which need to be dealt with to consolidate the peace process. These are:

1. Constitutional and political change;
2. Demilitarisation;
3. Democratic rights.

Inclusive negotiations, without vetoes or preconditions should therefore begin without further unnecessary delay.

**Basis for Dialogue**

Sinn Féin entered this bi-lateral dialogue with the British government to;

- a) secure equality of treatment through the ending of the discrimination which our party and our electorate suffer, and;
- b) move towards inclusive dialogue by working out the logistics of all party peace talks led by both governments which are the essential means to a political settlement.

These are the primary issues which we wish to discuss at today's meeting. We seek assurances of your government's commitment to address both matters positively. It is obvious that if the peace process is to be advanced that the British government must treat all citizens on the basis of equality.

**Equality of treatment**

Democratic principles demand that Sinn Féin have the same access to political discussions and negotiations as the other main parties. A two track approach to political discussions, as outlined by Patrick Mayhew, is not acceptable. The peace process, if it is to be viable, must be based on equality. The position is quite clear. There should be an end to political discrimination and your government must now meet with us on the same basis that you are proposing to meet the other democratically mandated political parties. We expect this to occur in consequence of today's meeting which marks the ending of the ban on ministerial contact with Sinn Féin.

At the last meeting between British government officials and Sinn Féin, on 7 February 1995, Sinn Féin requested a meeting with Patrick Mayhew. This request has been repeated in three subsequent letters from our President, Gerry Adams, to your Prime Minister, John Major. None of these requests have been answered. It is imperative, in light of Patrick Mayhew's invitation to the other main political parties, that this meeting is now arranged without further delay and as a clear indication that your government intends to accord our party and electorate full equality of treatment.

We expect to see also a rationalisation of the contact between Sinn Féin and your government at all other levels and that our political representatives will have proper access to British government ministers, departments and agencies on the same basis as other political parties.

**All party peace talks**

It is obvious that all electorally mandated political parties must be accorded equality of treatment. The views of the Sinn Féin electorate must be included in the dialogue and negotiations which will shape the future of Ireland and the Irish people.

Sinn Féin is fully committed to dialogue and inclusive negotiations based on democratic principles as the only viable means of securing a lasting peace settlement. This was underlined publicly by the Sinn Féin President, Gerry Adams, in a joint statement, issued with the then Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds and the SDLP leader John Hume on 6th September 1994, which stated:

*"We are at the beginning of a new era in which we are totally committed to democratic and peaceful methods of resolving our political problems. We reiterate that our objective is an equitable and lasting agreement that can command the allegiance of all".*

In attempting to progress towards that position republicans have consistently demonstrated a willingness to be reasonable and flexible. Without this the peace process would not have been brought to its present position. The most important element in bringing the situation to this point, as is universally acknowledged, was the IRA's announcement of 31 August 1994. It is regrettable that your government has not made a response corresponding to the magnitude of the opportunity provided by this courageous decision.

We are convinced that the political climate would be significantly improved if your government responded similarly to the need for a demilitarisation of the situation. A complete end to British military operations, the dismantling of military installations, the disbanding of the RUC and the speedy release of all political prisoners, for example, would greatly assist the peace process.

We are convinced that if the political will exists that we can finally remove the causes of conflict through the achievement of a democratic political settlement in Ireland. We now have an unprecedented opportunity to build a lasting peace. The effective application for the first time of democratic principles, and the achievement of a political settlement on this basis, is the only way to permanently remove conflict. The potential of the historic opportunity which currently exists must be realised.

There are of course many obvious political differences between us, but 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.

10 May 1995

## TOWARDS A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT

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 Féin'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 Féin 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 Féin and the British government must address the discrimination which Sinn Féin 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 Féin must be accorded equality of treatment with all other political parties.



4. Inclusive and all embracing peace talks led by the London and Dublin governments 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.

9 December 1994