



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/97/12

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**Meeting of Taoiseach and Tánaiste with Sinn Féin Delegation,**

**Government Buildings, Friday, 27 January, 1995**

1. A list of those present at the meeting, which lasted for about an hour and a half, is attached.
2. The Taoiseach welcomed the Sinn Féin delegation, noting that this was the first formal meeting between the two sides. Mr. Adams expressed Sinn Féin's appreciation for the meeting - and for the contacts which had already been held at official level. He added that the importance of body language and optics should never be underestimated - this meeting would send a message which would be favourably received by "the widest possible nationalist community".
3. Mr. Adams said that before starting, he wanted to place on record that Sinn Féin were being subjected to increased levels of harassment by the Special Branch in the South. He gave a number of examples, including that there had been a large Special Branch contingent at the funeral of Mr. Paddy McRory, that Mr. Pat Doherty and others had been followed afterwards and that the Sinn Féin delegation were followed while making their way from Sinn Féin Headquarters to the Forum. Mr. Adams said that these occurrences found their way into the Republican grapevine and gave the wrong signals.
4. Resuming his opening remarks proper, Mr. Adams said that the Sinn Féin delegation would like to know - in confidence - where the Framework Document was at now and where it was going. He went on to say that there was in a sense a crisis pending in terms of the British stance (on talks with Sinn Féin). Compared to the approach of the Irish Government, the British weren't even an inch up the road. Talks at official level were fair enough but the officials were operating to a tight mandate. Mr. Adams had discussed the matter with the Taoiseach and Sinn Féin were taking up the



Taoiseach's suggestion for moving forward to talks involving British Government Ministers. He added that he was only identifying this potential crisis with a view to averting it. If it did arise, it would be because of the British refusal to recognise Sinn Féin's mandate. Mr. Adams referred in this connection to the refusal of the British Economics Minister to shake hands with him during his recent visit to the Falls Road, adding that, if Sinn Féin had wished, they could easily have stopped the visit from taking place. He referred also to the fact that there had been no movement on prisoners and that the release of Private Clegg seemed to be inevitable. All prisoners should be released, including Clegg but if he alone were to be released, this would give a signal that it was o.k. for a paratrooper to kill an Irish citizen. Mr. Adams also referred to the RUC Chief Constable's recent remark that no prisoners should be released.

5. Mr. Adams said that while it was all very well for himself and John Hume to speak out on issues like these, the Government needed to take a position as well (Mr. Adams recognised that the Government might have to take a broader view and take the Unionist position into account). It was clear that the British Government were not prepared to move or at most, to move only in a very minimal sense and this gave rise to a sense of frustration.
6. Turning to the situation on the ground, Mr. Adams said that problems of harassment continued, especially in rural areas. He referred to the recent search of the O'Donnells house and of the McGuidheon's Home. The latter case was of probably even greater significance than the former, as this was a well-respected family. Mr. Adams referred to a recent article by Anne Cadwallader in the Sunday Press which had highlighted the sense of "ceasefire - what ceasefire?" which was prevalent on the ground, and which was given substance by the continuing presence of the RUC and British troops.
7. On the positive side, Mr. Adams said that it was still all to play for. The ceasefire had survived a number of ups and downs. In the North and perhaps to a lesser extent in the South, there was an expectation, however, that matters needed to be moved along and a settlement reached. Mr. Adams also said that the peace process needed



to be consolidated by small-scale initiatives, such as the current meeting, in order to generate a sense of movement. There was an almost psychological sense of apprehension in the air at present. While the British Prime Minister couldn't be relied on to assist, the Irish Government and John Hume had an important role to play.

8. The Tánaiste referred to his meeting the previous day with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State to discuss the Framework Document. Some progress had been made during the 5½ hours of negotiations but, as had always been expected, certain key issues remained to be resolved. It had always been known that it would have taken at least one more meeting - at Head of Government level - to finalise matters. We were now at the stage where, in a matter of weeks, we would have to resolve matters. The Tánaiste felt that, having regard to Mr. Adams' point about the need to keep up the momentum, it was important that the Framework Document should be completed. The Framework Document was a catalyst for the all-party talks which Sinn Féin was seeking. The Government would try to drive matters to finality as soon as possible.
9. On the question of British Ministerial involvement in talks with Sinn Féin, the Tánaiste said that he understood that the British planned to move to this stage before Easter - although it was possible that Sinn Féin would be able to bring forward the timing of such talks by exhausting the topics for discussion at official level, (as suggested by the Taoiseach to Mr. Adams). He mentioned that he had disavowed the recent claim in the Financial Times that the Unionists would be given a veto under the Framework Document: no vetoes would be given to anybody.
10. Mr. O'Caolagáin pressed for details of the issues in the Framework Document which remained to be resolved, the issues which had been settled, whether there were any problems with the default mechanism and what areas would be covered by the cross-border institutions.
11. The Tánaiste said that everyone knew what the crunch issues were. A lot of progress had been made on the European dimension of the Framework Document. Certain

matters relating to constitutional issues and the cross-border institutions remained to be settled. He believed that a solution could be found. The Government were very conscious that whatever was put together in the Framework Document had to work. There could accordingly be no question of giving anyone a veto.

12. Mr. Adams expressed concern about the British Government's intentions regarding the Strand 1 element. The Tánaiste said that while this was a matter for the British Government, they were fully aware of the Irish Government's concerns - and the concerns of everybody else. They had been told that there was no point in bringing out a proposal that was not in sync with the Framework Document.
13. The Taoiseach emphasised that the Framework Document was a framework, not a settlement. It contained a certain amount of calculated ambiguity which would need to be teased out in discussion. That said, he had been struck, on seeing the document for the first time, by the amount of detail which it contained and further progress had of course been made since then.
14. Following a further query from Mr. Doherty about the question of a default mechanism, the Tánaiste said that every effort was being made to ensure that the document was workable. He indicated that he wished to avoid being more specific than that, as this question was currently the subject of some controversy. Mr. Adams said that Sinn Féin would treat any information conveyed to them in the strictest of confidence. The Tánaiste said that a private briefing of Mr. Adams could be arranged.  
The Taoiseach added that no party had been briefed to the extent of being given a copy of the Framework Document and that it was important that that would be the position with Sinn Féin as well. Mr. Adams said that it was important at the very least for the Government to realise that the questions posed by Mr. O'Caolagáin and Mr. Doherty were the kind of questions which people would be asking about the Framework Document. In a sense, the Unionists' strongest weapon was to do nothing and this had worked for them in the past. There was also the danger that the Framework Document could flounder on ambiguity.



15. The Taoiseach responded to the last point by noting that the purpose of the document was to set out a framework for talks: if it were too specific, there would be nothing to talk about.
16. Mr. Adams said that Sinn Féin believed that in a situation of continuing delay with the Framework Document, it would be better to proceed on the basis of some other document or perhaps no document at all. The Tánaiste said that we were not at the stage where this needed to be considered.
17. The Tánaiste asked the Sinn Féin delegation for their views as to how the Unionists' minds could be changed. Mr. Adams responded that the question was how the British Government's mind could be changed. He added that it was not the case that the Unionists refused only to talk to Sinn Féin - they wouldn't talk to the Irish Government either. The Taoiseach said that it was of key importance that the UUP should change their approach. He noted that the situation in regard to that party was compounded by internal problems and the enormous influence which they were currently enjoying at Westminster - to the extent that their interests were not the same as those of their constituents. Mr. Adams agreed, and said that in his view, grass-roots Unionists wanted talks. In support, he noted that the arrival of the Sinn Féin delegation at Stormont for the first round of official - level talks had been greeted by just one protester. The Taoiseach commented that the UUP appeared to be suffering from "cabin-fever" at Westminster.
18. Ms. Breathnach, at the invitation of Mr. Adams, gave an assessment of the talks with the British side. She said that the British Government were still not giving Sinn Féin voters equality of treatment or parity of esteem, as the talks continued to be held at official level. Echoing Mr. Adams, she said that expectations in the Nationalist community, especially in the North, were fairly high; and that Sinn Féin were anxious to avert any crisis in the talks process over the coming weeks. The talks to date had made very little progress: and while references had been made to the removal of the ban on Ministerial involvement, this was to be subject to certain conditions/criteria.

19. Ms. Breathnach referred to artificial and protracted stalling on the part of the British. She also referred to the possibility that the issues in the talks would be exhausted in the very near future. A programme of five meetings - on ground rules, housing, education, language and prisoners - had been set up but in fact most of the pertinent issues had already been discussed. Ms. Bhreathnach said that Sinn Féin could have been more forceful in stating that there had been very little movement on the British side. She also expressed concern at the suggestion that it would be necessary to wait till some time before Easter for Ministerial involvement in the talks. There was a danger of a vacuum and in this situation, it would be necessary to focus on small initiatives to maintain movement. Ms. Breathnach concluded by emphasising the importance of moving quite speedily to talks, both bilateral and multilateral.

20. Mr. Adams said in support that there was not enough to talk about between now and April and hinted at the dangers if Sinn Féin were to say publicly what they were saying at the meeting. The British side's talk of "decontamination" gave an insight into their attitude. Mr. Adams added that the pub talk in the Ardoyne was that the ceasefire would end in March or April.

21. The Taoiseach referred - in the context of a strategy of small initiatives - to the usefulness of the programme of five meetings proposed by the British side. This would allow the Irish Government to perhaps intervene and to be of assistance e.g. on the issue of release of prisoners. By contrast, it was not very easy to intervene where the issue - that the British were stalling - could be termed a matter of perception. It was for the same reason that the Government had intervened on the Meanscoil Feirste question - i.e. it was felt that we could move forward on a practical issue.

22. Mr. Adams said that even when the British moved on Meanscoil Feirste or on withdrawal of troops, they would get no thanks. The Taoiseach said that this kind of approach might suggest that no matter what the British did, Sinn Féin would never be satisfied: Sinn Féin should instead accentuate the positive. Mr. Adams suggested



that Ms. Breathnach and Mr. McGuinness should hold a private session with officials, so that specific issues could be firmed up.

23. The Taoiseach referred to the withdrawal of British troops from daytime patrol in Belfast and asked - as an example of a specific issue - what further steps Sinn Féin would like to see in this area. Mr. Adams said that Sinn Féin wanted the soldiers to be withdrawn from nationalist areas. Whatever about previously, there was no justification now for their presence on nationalist territory. Mr. Adams referred to continuing harassment. The Tánaiste asked if Sinn Féin felt that there had been any movement at all on the withdrawal of troops or any improvement as regards reduced levels of harassment. He added that according to the information available to the Government, there had been some improvement. Mr. Adams said that there was a sense of relief that it was now possible to move freely up and down the Falls Road without being stopped by soldiers. However, this situation obtained only in Belfast: the troops were still present in rural areas. The Taoiseach said that while for Sinn Féin, withdrawal of the British army had positive connotations, for unionists it equated with political withdrawal. Ms. Bhreathnach commented that the withdrawal of troops meant the removal of the physical symbols of oppression in the eyes of children and adults. Mr. O'Caolagáin referred to his recent experience of a protracted delay as a result of the establishment of an army checkpoint in South Armagh - which wouldn't have been possible before the ceasefire. This kind of intrusiveness generated hostility. The Tánaiste responded that for every story on these lines, there were forty where people had remarked on the absence of such checkpoints/delays.
24. The Taoiseach commented that it would be very difficult for the British to make a public declaration that they were withdrawing troops. However, they might just go ahead and do it quietly. Mr. Adams said that there were two important points to be made here. First, that the presence/behaviour of British troops could disrupt the peace process. Second, there was the issue of democratic rights. There might be good reasons as to why the British behaved in the way that they did but it should be borne in mind, for example, that the Irish language had no legal status in Northern Ireland, that nationalists couldn't educate their children through Irish, that 150 days



after the ceasefire, nationalist youths could still be stopped and checked outside pubs and clubs. In the North, the RUC were seen as the enemy. Less prisoners had been released this year than last. The RUC Chief Constable had said that no prisoners should be released. Mr. Adams indicated that he was saying all this to give a sense of the situation in the North. The reality was that there was no reason for British troops to be in Nationalist areas.

25. Mr. Adams continued by saying that, as he had said on a previous occasion, the reason why British soldiers were patrolling at night-time in Belfast was to give them some exercise after being cooped-up all day in Dickensian conditions. He said that it should always be remembered that there was an acute sense of distrust, dislike and in some cases, hatred of the RUC. Mr. Adams added that he himself did not hate the RUC but he could understand people doing so - RUC members often addressed people living in Nationalist areas simply as "Fenian bastard". Mr. Adams drew attention to the interview on a recent edition of "Morning Ireland" where the RUC had been described as a war organisation, whose recruits were trained in aggression, firepower and speed. He did not blame the individual members of the RUC/British Army: they were simply doing what they had been trained to do. However, there was a need to move on, because whatever reasonable grounds the security forces had for their activities, they had a negative effect on the ground. Nationalists sensed a conspiracy when they saw that troops were still patrolling - even though Mr. Adams himself believed that the reasons were tactical.
26. The Tánaiste asked if Sinn Féin accepted that progress was being made on the Meanscoil Feirste issue. Mr. Adams said that he believed that the British would concede. Ms. Breathnach said that movement on this specific area was obviously welcome but that it inevitably raised the wider issue - the status of the Irish language. The Tánaiste said that he was very confident that this issue could be resolved also.
27. The Taoiseach asked Mr. Adams for his views on the future of policing in Northern Ireland. Mr. Adams said that this issue was linked in with progress on the Framework Document. There was a need for a policing service which was

representative of the people. This was a challenging notion. The problem at present was that while a big section of the nationalist community wanted a police force, they were faced on the one hand with the unacceptable option of punishment beatings and on the other, with the RUC. The future of policing needed to be considered in the context of an overall settlement.

28. The Taoiseach commented that to leave this matter to be settled in the context of an overall settlement could give rise to difficulties. The most important of these was the question of unionist consent. There were also practical problems e.g. how to deal with child abuse cases. The Taoiseach noted in this context the rejoinders to the recent advice of Mr. Adams that child abuse cases should not be referred to the RUC. He asked if anything could be done in the area of policing, in the context of the strategy of small initiatives.

29. Mr. Adams said that there was a need to make progress in the short-term but that a permanent solution could only be found in the context of an overall settlement. The RUC were unacceptable. Mr. Adams complained that the Head of the RUC Drug Squad had tried to link the republican movement with drugs in a recent television interview. He also said that the RUC were mounting a charm offensive in schools. He supported the mounting of pacifistic challenges to this campaign, which was driving parents mad. So far as dealing with child abuse, drugs etc., there were plenty of bona fide options. Sinn Féin dealt with cases of child abuse, incest, domestic violence by processing them and forwarding them to a neutral body such as a health board, which in turn would bring them to the attention of the RUC. Mr. Adams added that many people were willing to comply with the regulation which required insurance claims for broken windows to be endorsed by an RUC member. This represented a kind of a-la-carte approach to the RUC. The Taoiseach suggested that this was an area which could be explored on a more informal basis and where progress could be made.

30. Mr. Adams said that, as had been put by a member at the SDLP, the problem was that to recognise the RUC meant recognising the legitimacy of the State (of Northern



Ireland), which in turn meant denying the rights of Catholics and nationalists. He referred again to the recent remarks by the RUC Chief Constable and said that not one RUC member had served a prison sentence for murder - despite the fact that he could point out every 200 yards or so, the places on the Falls Road where people had been murdered by the RUC. What was needed was an unarmed, democratically accountable policing service to which people could give their allegiance. Mr. Adams said that he believed that this issue could be moved along in an informal way. Ms. O'Hare said that progress on these lines should not be confused with what needed to be done in the longer term.

31. Mr. Doherty said that the release of prisoners in the South had been well noted and well received. He also paid tribute to the imaginative way in which the releases had been handled (use of 1939 Offences Against the State Act). However, we were now five months into the peace process and only 9 prisoners had been released. Sinn Féin would like an undertaking/indication - not necessarily at this meeting - that the Government would deal with all republican prisoners and not leave out the difficult cases. Mr. Doherty also asked about the position regarding the ratification of the Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons, which was another useful small initiative.
32. The Taoiseach said that the legislation in question as above had priority and that it was hoped to have it enacted before Easter. On the question of release of prisoners, he would prefer not to get into individual cases at this stage. However, in general terms, the Government would wish to keep matters moving. They had approached the releases which had already taken place in a creative spirit and they could be expected to approach the question (of further releases) in the same spirit.
33. Mr. Doherty remarked that Sinn Féin had previously understood that the legislation on the Convention would be introduced in late November/early December, 1994 and he expressed concern at the pre-Easter time - frame referred to by the Taoiseach. Mr. O'Úiginn said that it was a question of getting a slot in the legislative programme.

Mr. Donlon said that he would establish the timetable for processing the legislation and pass it on to Mr. O'Doherty.

34. Mr. Adams said that there was a need to send strong signals (to move the peace process along) by means, for example, of keynote speeches by the Taoiseach/Government. Mr. Adams felt that ordinary people in Britain were responsive/supportive: he had almost been mobbed by ordinary people during his visit there. The Government should develop a concerted campaign aimed at the leader writers and the diplomatic corps as before Hillsborough. The British Government was not popular (or representative of ordinary people). Mr. Adams also said that Sinn Féin were seeking equality of treatment in the US.
35. The Tánaiste said that the Anglo-Irish Division of his Department was being strengthened: it was recognised that there was a need for more staff to explain to people what was happening. The Taoiseach commented that he did not favour megaphone diplomacy (adding that he preferred to be rude to people in private rather than to put it up to them in public). Mr. Adams said that there was a need for public statements to balance the kind of remarks made by the RUC Chief Constable. The Taoiseach responded by pointing out that the Government did not rule out going public, as he had in effect done in the Clegg case. There was always a danger, however, in speaking out, that people might begin to feel that the peace process was running into serious difficulty.
36. Mr. Adams indicated that in a situation where the British Government were not in a proactive mode, it was even more important for the Irish Government to move matters along by taking action within this jurisdiction (Transfer of Prisoners etc.). Mr. Doherty added that Sinn Féin believed the British were stalling. They were not entering into things in the same wholehearted spirit as the Irish Government. This put a huge onus on the Government here to take up the slack. Mr. Doherty said that Sinn Féin believed that even when British Ministers became involved in talks, this would develop into another stalling exercise.



37. The Taoiseach asked for Sinn Féin's views on how to involve unionists. Mr. Adams said that this was a separate issue. The position of the unionists should not stop the British from becoming involved in inclusive talks.
38. The Tánaiste said that the Government were trying to speed matters up, although it had to be recognised that they couldn't force the British Government. He wished to raise two issues with the Sinn Féin side - punishment beatings and decommissioning of arms. He had been given to understand that there was a lot of thinking going on in Loyalist circles about the modalities of decommissioning. Was any similar consideration being given by the other side? Mr. Adams responded by saying that he was very pleased that since well before Christmas, there had not been one punishment beating in West Belfast. The last case had involved a child abuser. Punishment beatings were an embarrassment to him. He was also critical of the tendency to lay all punishment beatings at the door of the IRA. He illustrated this point with two examples of simple "rough justice", one relating to a car theft and the other to a street corner fight. On decommissioning, Mr. Adams said that people should be very clear - he did not want to deceive people about the IRA or indeed deceive the IRA - the IRA would not hand over one detonator, piece of Semtex or weapon to anybody. At the same time, Mr. Adams accepted that the weapons had to be decommissioned. When Sinn Féin had indicated that they were willing to use whatever influence they had (to resolve the decommissioning issue) they did not mean to imply that they could secure the handing over of weapons: if they went to the IRA to ask for this, they would be laughed at. The most important thing was that people should be satisfied that the weapons were not in fact being used. Mr. Adams said that reports that Loyalists were prepared to move on decommissioning should be treated with scepticism. He recommended that we should let sleeping dogs lie, so far as decommissioning was concerned, until the opportune moment came to open the door.
39. Mr. O'Caolagáin returned to the question of a private briefing on the questions raised earlier concerning the Framework Document. The Tánaiste said that a meeting could be arranged in due course. Mr. Adams said that Sinn Féin would be interested in the implications for Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. The Tánaiste said that his

constituents in Kerry were every bit as interested and that he was fully conscious of this. Mr. O'Caolagáin asked if the new Government's approach differed from that of its predecessor. The Taoiseach said that there had been no change as such between the two. The Tánaiste said that Mr. O hUiginn would meet with Mr. Adams. It was also agreed that Ms. Breathnach and Mr. McGuinness would meet with officials for an issue by issue discussion.

The meeting concluded with a discussion of the handling of press queries about the meeting.