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Reference Code: 2021/98/13

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Our Ref: 06/102

Date: 07 June 1996

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
SIR PATRICK MAYHEW AND THE IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER, MR DICK SPRING, LONDON,
THURSDAY, 6 JUNE 1996

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I am very glad to welcome the Tanaiste again at the end of a period of fairl intense discussions over the matters which the government have now come to agreement upon.

Both governments have been working for a long time to bring about all-party negotiations, which will be comprehensive in their agenda, inclusive in their composition and successful in their outcome.

The recent elections opened the gateway for these negotiations, and the two governments have now taken a very important further step by agreeing proposals on a range of detailed issues relating to the negotiations, including the arrangements we envisage for the opening plenary session which starts on Monday. These build directly on the joint ground rules paper which we published in April.

I want first off to say a word about chairmanships and participation in the talks. We are very pleased that Senator George Mitchell and his colleagues from the international body, General de Chastelain and Mr Holkeri, have agreed to act in these negotiations in the way set out in the paper, 'Scenario for Opening Plenary Session', which we are publishing this evening. We are fortunate indeed to have secured the services of this group of distinguished men and I am confident that the integrity, experience and independence which they will individually bring to their respective chairmanships will contribute greatly to the prospects for the success of these negotiations.

It is manifest that Sinn Fein have excluded themselves from these negotiations. We regret that greatly. But good faith negotiations cannot take place in a democracy if one group is inextricably linked with those who threaten to carry out atrocious acts of violence while negotiations are proceeding. Both governments made their positions clear in the 28 February communique and subsequently. If Sinn Fein wants to join this genuine and comprehensive negotiating process, as they should and as we want them to do, then they must remove their self-imposed exclusion. The ceasefire of August 1994 must be unequivocally restored. That is not only what the two governments are calling for, I believe it to be demanded by the vast majority of people throughout these islands.

The papers we have sent to the parties, and are publishing today, set out how we envisage business proceeding at the opening plenary session. They fulfil the themes from the communique by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on 28 February, and from the later ground rules paper that the two governments jointly produced in April. These stipulated that all participants would need to make clear their total and absolute commitment to the six principles of democracy and non-violence, set out by the international body. Next, they would also need to address the body's proposals on decommissioning. And lastly, confidence building would also require that the parties had reassurance that a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations was genuinely being

offered.

We have now agreed a clear procedure for registering commitment to the principles. Once proceedings have been opened, the leader of each of the negotiating teams will be asked to make a formal declaration of his or her party's total and absolute commitment to the principles, and these commitments will then be confirmed in a public statement that proceedings themselves will be confidential, as set out in the ground rules.

On decommissioning, both governments accept the whole report of the international body and support the compromise approach to decommissioning which it proposes. Under this approach some decommissioning would take place during the process of all-party negotiations, rather than before or after.

We are agreed that it is on the basis of working constructively to implement this, and all other aspects of the report, that the negotiations should be advanced.

We have accordingly agreed to invite the independent chairman, after open discussion in the plenary, to satisfy himself that there are clear indications of good intent on the part of all the participants to work constructively and in good faith to secure the implementation of all aspects of the report. He will do so in the context of an inclusive and dynamic process of negotiation building trust and confidence.

Once the chairman has reported that after open discussion he is so satisfied the two governments will propose that the action should be taken forward in sub-committee of the plenary on the lines set out in the paper. This sub-committee will also be chaired by Senator Mitchell who, as the former chairman of the international body, can clearly bring to bear a special insight and authority to take these issues forward.

Finally, both governments place high priority on achieving an inclusive and dynamic process of negotiations enabling progress across all the issues. We therefore also envisage the opening plenary session will adopt and commit the participants to negotiate a comprehensive agenda covering the substantive political issues which arise in each of the three main sets of relationships concerned.

To that end we have today also circulated an outline agenda for the parties' consideration. Additionally we are proposing and circulating a set of procedural rules to help the whole negotiation to run smoothly. To help ensure that progress is being maintained, we shall propose that a further meeting of the plenary should be held after a suitable period, about the end of September to take stock of progress in the negotiations as a whole, including the work of the sub-committee. That meeting will give all participants the chance to review the position across the entire spectrum.

In conclusion, therefore, this is a most important moment for Northern Ireland. I greatly hope that it will prove to be a turning point and an historic turning point for the better. For its part, the British Government commits itself to the achievement of a stable political accommodation, founded upon agreement and underpinning the true and lasting peace that the people of Northern Ireland yearn for and deserve.

MR SPRING:

Good Afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome to our press conference. You know, the package whose details we are publishing today has been agreed after many hours of intensive negotiations between the British and Irish governments.

It is my belief that it represents the best basis we can offer for meaningful serious, comprehensive and inclusive negotiations. Those negotiations will

about a new beginning in all of our relationships, for Northern Ireland, with the island of Ireland and between the two islands.

We have reached agreement between the two governments on what we would like to see in a comprehensive agenda for the negotiations in all of their strands. We have agreed procedural guidelines which we hope will facilitate the launch of those negotiations. We have prepared a joint paper outlining a scenario for the opening phase of negotiations.

In that scenario we believe we have achieved our shared objective of enabling and encouraging progress to be made in substantive political dialogue, while at the same time we are all working constructively and in good faith to secure implementation of the report of the international body on decommissioning.

What we are aiming at, and the scenario paper makes this clear, is the creation of an inclusive and dynamic process which builds trust and confidence as progress is made on the issues, and which will enable all of us to resolve complex and difficult questions.

Finally we have agreed that we should invite the former members of the international body, who have already done such outstanding work and dedicated work in the cause of peace, to play a role in chairing aspects of the negotiations under the chairmanship of Senator George Mitchell. We are even more in their debt now that the three members of the body have agreed to undertake this challenge.

As we have said in the documents agreed between us, we are hopeful that Senator Mitchell, with the help of his colleagues, will assist us in giving effect to our joint commitment under paragraph 15 of the ground rules paper. Under that paragraph, as you know, we have expressed our determination that the structure and process of the negotiations will be used in the most constructive possible manner in the search for agreement.

We have also committed ourselves in that paragraph to use our influence in the appropriate strands to ensure that all items on the comprehensive agenda are fully addressed in the negotiating process, and to do so with a view to overcoming any obstacles which may arise. These are important commitments on our part and will involve crucial and complex tasks. They will call on the skill that we know George Mitchell and his colleagues have.

Both governments are on record as stating that we want to see Sinn Fein taking part in the process as an equal partner. It is up to them. Now is the moment of decision. There can be no reason to fudge a decision at this time.

We seek the unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of 31 August 1994. As soon as that happens Sinn Fein will be invited to take a full part in the negotiations. Until it happens, they cannot be.

For my own part, I hope that the IRA can find the vision to facilitate Sinn Fein's participation. The basis that we have now established seeks to exclude nobody from the table and no issue from the agenda. We are at the start of a process of real and meaningful change. We will enter this process driven on by an unremitting search for agreement and a new beginning. Our aim, our hope and obligation is to plant the roots of a lasting peace. These roots will, we hope, grow in the weeks ahead into a sturdy plant. We want everyone to be involved in the work with us, we want everyone in the time that is left to study these documents carefully and to equip themselves to take part in the meaningful, comprehensive and inclusive process that is now about to begin.

QUESTION:

Could you tell me what exactly is the alternate chairman doing, Mr Holkeri?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

If I may respond first. It is our proposal that to the extent that circumstances may warrant it, Mr Holkeri, who has of course the same experience as the other two members of the international body valuably gained at the end of last year and the beginning of this, should be available as an alternate chairman in whatever formation or strand of discussion may seem desirable. I am very grateful to Prime Minister Holkeri for agreeing to do that.

QUESTION:

Do you mean that when Senator Mitchell and General de Chastelain cannot be there, he will be there?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

That would be an example.

QUESTION (Independent):

Without Sinn Fein at the talks, will the negotiations about decommissioning be rather academic? And if Sinn Fein do actually qualify for the talks at a later stage, will you put off the September review date?

MR SPRING:

A number of aspects to that question, if I may. Firstly, it is of course crucial that in terms of dealing with the decommissioning question that Sinn Fein be present at that phase of the discussions. It is unlikely, I think it is fair to say, that others will engage in a meaningful addressing of the decommissioning question in their absence. It is our hope, and we have set to bring it about, that they would be in a position to be at the talks, soon rather than later. As I said in my opening remarks, it is incumbent upon Sinn Fein and the IRA to make the decisions that are necessary. Both governments are very clear in what is required. I believe that there is an overwhelming desire on the island of Ireland for people to be at the talks, the conditions are very clear and I certainly hope they can participate. As for looking at timetables, obviously we would look at that as the situation evolves.

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I warmly agree with that, yes.

QUESTION:

Two questions: firstly, is the plan for the two prime ministers both to be there on Monday to make statements on behalf of the government as in Item 1 of the first session of the agenda? And the second question perhaps to the Taoiseach, what specifically is in this agreement that will give added incentive to Sinn Fein and to the IRA to participate? The attitude this week towards talks has been disparaging, what value-added is there in here to encourage them?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

It is our hope that both prime ministers will be present to launch the talks they will be there to do that and no more is our expectation.

MR SPRING:

That is certainly the position. In relation to the considerations, as I said I would hope that all parties would give due consideration and indeed careful consideration to the documents that we are presenting today; they are a substantial volume of work in preparation for Monday of next week and I have said that as far as I am concerned and the Irish government - indeed both governments - if people want reason to be at those talks I believe they are contained within this documentation. We have set out a very comprehensive approach to the all-party talks with the team of George Mitchell, General de Chastelain and Mr Holkeri to be with us who have done excellent work for us the past and the agenda for the opening plenary session is very clear and I believe that the formulation which we have laid out in relation to the agenda should allay fears, indeed any fears right across all the parties in Northern Ireland - if they want to make a contribution to the development of the process.

they should be at the talks on Monday.

QUESTION:

The IRA have made it clear on two occasions this week that they will not decommission until the final ... of the situation. You say that Sinn Fein come in if they declare a ceasefire, you want decommissioning to take place during the talks. The IRA have categorically ruled that out so how do you get Sinn Fein into the process?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

It is for Sinn Fein to lift the self-exclusion which they have imposed. Both governments have made it clear that they want them there; they have a democratic mandate, what is being asked is that they commit themselves to democratic practices and methods. Unless they are prepared to adopt the proposals upon which the governments themselves stand, that is to say those that are found in the Mitchell Report, then it is impossible to see how they can fulfil that basic requirement. We want to see them lifting that self-exclusion.

QUESTION:

You have presented us today with a scenario for negotiations of a type which do not yet know but can you say whether or not you secured in advance of this the assent of the parties in Northern Ireland, particularly the Ulster Union Party and especially over the role of Senator Mitchell which seems to be an overarching role in this whole process?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

These are proposals that the governments are making, the governments believe that they are helpful proposals; they have been negotiated within the governments and discussed with great intensity and right up until a very short time ago. Therefore, it is not correct to say that there is consent obtained from each or any of those participants that will need to be at the talks. We have done our best within the time constraints of a very tight timetable to keep in touch but these are proposals, they cannot be construed as more than that.

JON SNOW (CHANNEL 4 NEWS):

Sir Patrick, this body of proposals that you have put together in the last few days, admittedly founded on much more work than that, why was it not possible to do this 16, 17, 18 months ago? Why has it taken until this point to get a comprehensive picture of how talks would begin?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

If I may provide the first answer to that, it has been necessary to secure the confidence of all who need to be at these talks that everybody sitting at the table will be wholly committed to peaceful methods and democratic ways, as indeed the Downing Street Declaration of 1993 made very clear and it is because it has proved very difficult to secure a practical means by which that confidence can be engendered that so much time has been taken up. I will not spend time today going over the history that followed the ceasefire of August 1994 but that is the reason why. It has not been through any lack of a desire to see talks taking place, that has been the common purpose of both governments for the last four or five years.

MR SPRING:

I would just add to that that we have had a series of preparatory talks in the last number of months, we are also dealing with ultimately very complex issues - a great deal of distrust in the background, difficulties between the parties - and at all times the governments have been working together to bring the widest possible number of parties with us in relation to sitting down to negotiate a final solution. Perhaps people will say it could have been done quicker and has taken us a considerable amount of time but I think what is most important is to get it right and I certainly believe, in terms of these

proposals, that the parties, if they have the goodwill and the interest of Northern Ireland at heart, should certainly come with the governments to the talks next Monday.

QUESTION:
(inaudible)

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

Everybody has, of course, to be willing to participate in this process. It is not a process that the governments can command everybody to attend and stay with and accept what governments might like to see. It has, by its inherent nature, to be a process to which everybody voluntarily subscribes. Because there are proposals which you will see in the procedural guidelines which the governments have drawn up whereby agreement shall be measured for individual proposals, we very much hope that in all matters of substance agreement will be attained at least as to how these matters are to be addressed.

QUESTION:

Sir Patrick, in your opening remarks, you said that you expect some decommissioning will take place during the first session of all-party negotiations. Is there any timetable on that at all and do you expect Loyal paramilitaries to hand over any weapons as long as Sinn Fein is excluded - or do you exclude themselves in your words - from the negotiations?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

Obviously, the core of the compromise proposed in the Mitchell Report is that some decommissioning shall take place during the progress of negotiations, not before as some people had argued, not at the end as others had argued. It will carry greater conviction of course if it comes sooner rather than later.

You will see in the proposals that the business committee shall be empowered to produce what is called an 'indicative calendar', a kind of time-scale, but it will be something which the business committee itself, comprised of those who are participating in the talks, think in their discretion is a sensible one that is the position there.

As to the Loyalists, the British Government recognise - and I think this is true of both governments - the role that the Loyalist parties played in bringing about the ceasefire announcement by the CLMC in October of 1994, that is the largest organisation. I think they brought a serious approach to the issues and I am pleased that they secured their place in these negotiations under the system of election that was in place but they of course, like other parties, will need to address the issue of decommissioning at the opening session and if the governments' proposal is endorsed to participate in the sub-committee to secure the implementation of the Mitchell Report, including agreement on the ways in which decommissioning will take place. I do not underestimate the difficulties. The Tanaiste referred to them in his opening remarks a few minutes ago but I believe and hope that they will continue to play a responsible and a constructive part in the negotiations which we are entering.

QUESTION:

The Tanaiste, in his opening statement, said that the other two chairmen will work under Senator Mitchell, he is described in the documents as 'Chairman of chairmen with the power to recall the plenary whenever he sees fit.' Can you explain why that is not an overarching role for him?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I will point out that the chairmanship of Strand 1 will be the British Government, the chairmanship of Strand 3 will be both governments, the chair of the second strand is expressed to be the independent chairman, General de Chastelain, so that is the way in which this is proposed to be set up and that is not an overarching, as it were, chairmanship of all three vested in Senator Mitchell.

Mitchell who was chairman of this group when they sat as the independent bod

● SPRING:

● have say we were very impressed with the work done by George Mitchell and colleagues, very difficult work, very complex work and I would like to think they will bring the same team spirit back into our negotiations with the cooperation of the two governments and all the parties.

As I said earlier on, this is not going to be an easy task but if you look particularly at paragraphs 10, 11, 12 and 13 in the scenario for the opening session, I think we have dealt in a very reasonable and logical fashion with the whole question of decommissioning. I do not think anybody could demur f what we have proposed on this occasion.

ENDS