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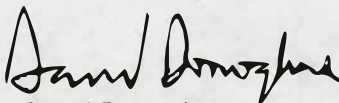
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Multi-Party Talks**Daily Report - 26 February 1997**1. **In summary:**

- The Plenary has been adjourned until noon on Wednesday 5 March to allow the Chairmen to consult delegations on a "soft landing" for the talks;
 - This morning's session amounted to a dress rehearsal of the grandstanding expected from the DUP and the UKUP at next week's Plenary. Two themes seem likely to be emphasised - the need for votes on the decommissioning proposals tabled by these two parties and criticism of the Governments for the suspension of the Forum which will follow a suspension of the talks.
2. The Government delegation was led today by Minister Coveney. We had bilateral meetings with the British Government and with the SDLP.
 3. Opening this morning's Plenary, PM Holkeri read out a statement, agreed privately beforehand with the two Governments, which noted that no basis had yet emerged for agreement in respect of conclusions on the decommissioning item. He proposed an adjournment until noon next Wednesday to facilitate consultations with the delegations on "what further steps would best serve the negotiating process", bearing in mind the approaching Easter holiday and the general and local elections.
 4. This proposal was supported by the two Governments and most delegations. However, the DUP and the UKUP demanded a debate on the product of the discussions between the SDLP, Alliance and the UUP as well as a debate and vote on their own decommissioning proposals.
 5. The UUP (Taylor) supported the Chair's proposal. They also mentioned that they had put another idea to the Chairmen yesterday and that it would be for the latter to follow this up. This, as we had been earlier informed by the Chairmen's staff and the British Government, was a proposal for the party leaders of the UUP, SDLP and Alliance to meet jointly with the Chairmen to discuss the question of terms of entry for Sinn Féin. In consultations between the two Governments prior to the Plenary, it was agreed that this was a matter solely for the two Governments and inappropriate, accordingly, for discussion by the parties. We suggested to the Chair the lines of a possible response to the UUP if this idea were pursued in the Plenary. In the event, the proposal was not developed by Taylor.
 6. Alliance proposed that some of the time left before a suspension be used by delegations to address the parades issue. This incurred the wrath of the DUP and the

UKUP, who denounced Alliance for refusing to accept a Forum decision last week not to receive a group of Garvaghy Road representatives and seeking instead to have parades discussed at the talks.

7. The SDLP (Mallon) put down markers about the UUP proposal, pointing out that certain matters were the business of the talks while others were the sole preserve of the two Governments. Mallon held that parties should be striking deals with each other, "not postures in the run-up to the election".
8. The DUP (Paisley) charged that the two Governments were intent on a suspension of the talks in order to secure the closure of the Forum (for which, under the legislation, a mere "adjournment" would not suffice). Paisley criticised the role of the Irish Government in negotiating the "destruction" of a Forum representing the people of Northern Ireland.
9. In a good-natured exchange before the Plenary concluded, John Taylor congratulated Sean O hUiginn on reports of his imminent appointment as Ambassador to the US. He wished him "Godspeed from Northern Ireland to Washington". Ian Paisley added his own good wishes, albeit in more sardonic terms. Mr O hUiginn advised both not to believe everything they read in the newspapers.
10. The two Governments supplied the Chairmen afterwards with a draft of the "soft landing" statement for next Wednesday's Plenary (attached).
11. We had a bilateral with the SDLP which dwelled mainly on the difficulties which Seamus Mallon, Joe Hendron and others will face in fending off the challenge from Sinn Féin, including voting fraud and intimidatory tactics, in the forthcoming election campaign.
12. There was also a brief bilateral with the British Government. The terms of a reply by the Secretary of State to the letter from David Trimble yesterday were discussed between the two Governments.



David Donoghue
26 February 1997

Confidential**PROPOSED STATEMENT BY THE INDEPENDENT CHAIRMEN, 5 MARCH 1997**

(Illustrative text offered to the Chairmen by the two Governments - 26 February 1997)

At a plenary meeting today, and in other bilateral meetings over the past week, the Independent Chairmen have reviewed the present state of the multi-party negotiations.

Since the process began on 10 June last year, following elections on 30 May, a series of meetings has been held in plenary, bilateral and other formations. The participants are agreed that the talks process, which allows for inclusive negotiations on a comprehensive agenda, between parties committed to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process, remains the key instrument in the search for progress. The process has underlined the belief, shared by all the participants, that a stable and peaceful future for Northern Ireland can only be secured through democratic negotiations.

All the participants have restated their belief that violence, for political ends, can and should have no place in Northern Ireland, whichever section of the community those who perpetrate it claim to represent. The participants are united in wishing to see an immediate and permanent end to all violence.

The Independent Chairmen are pleased to note that, as a result of discussions during the talks process, the participants negotiated and agreed, on 29 July 1996, detailed Rules of Procedure governing the structure and conduct of negotiations. The participants also went on to discuss and agree, in October, an agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary, setting out the subjects to be considered and the order in which they are to be addressed.

Since mid-October, the participants have been discussing item 2 on that agenda. This relates to the issue of decommissioning and, in particular, the report of the International Body. The discussions, which have taken place both in the plenary and bilateral and multilateral meetings between the various participants, have been lengthy and detailed. As a result of these discussions, the participants have all obtained a clearer understanding of each other's views. However, despite the efforts of all concerned, while some areas of potential agreement have been identified, no basis has yet emerged for reaching conclusions on this agenda item.

In the circumstances, bearing in mind that the Easter holiday period will be followed in quick succession by a General Election in the United Kingdom and District Council elections in Northern Ireland (due to take place on 21 May), the Independent Chairmen proposed that the negotiations should now be suspended until Monday 2 June. This has been agreed by [the participants] [the British and Irish Governments].

We look forward to picking up the negotiations in June with renewed vigour and commitment, and to working with the British and Irish Governments and all those parties meeting the requirements of paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Ground Rules in completing the

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address to the International Body's proposals on decommissioning. This would enable the negotiations to move to consideration of the substantive political issues concerning a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland, and between the two Governments.

(The following points might best be covered orally at the time).

- The two Governments and the Northern Ireland parties involved in the talks have unanimously expressed their gratitude to the Independent Chairmen for their stewardship of the process and for their unfailing courtesy and patience.
- The Governments and the parties are also grateful to the American, Canadian and Finnish Governments for agreeing that the Independent Chairmen should assist the talks in that capacity.
- The Independent Chairmen, the two Governments and the parties would also like to record their appreciation for the work of the administrative staff and others who have supported the talks at Stormont.