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STATEMENT BY THE FIRST MINISTER (Designate) AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER (Designate) TO THE NEW NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY, MONDAY 26 OCTOBER 1998

*Paddy
Pres.
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3.6; 6.1; 6.5;
6.6; 6.7; 9.1*

1. INTRODUCTION (FIRST MINISTER DESIGNATE)

1.1 Initial Presiding Officer, the Deputy First Minister (Designate) and I are grateful for this opportunity to make a Statement to the Assembly on a number of matters, namely: the North American Investment Roadshow; Departmental structures; the North-South Ministerial Council and the British Irish Council; the Civic Forum; and the forthcoming Brussels Conference for Assembly members.

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1.2 In the first part of the Statement I shall report on the North American Investment Roadshow, Departmental Structures and the British-Irish Council. The Deputy First Minister (Designate) will then deal with the North-South Ministerial Council, the Civic Forum and the Brussels Conference.

2. NORTH AMERICAN INVESTMENT ROADSHOW

2.1 The Deputy First Minister (Designate) and I formally launched the North American Investment Roadshow in New York on 7 October. The baton was subsequently taken up by Mark Durkan and Jeffrey Donaldson, and more recently by

Danny Kennedy, and I want to thank each of them for the work they have put into this important initiative.

2.2 The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced this initiative in May of this year as part of his £315 million package of special assistance to Northern Ireland. The express aim of the Chancellor's initiative is to underpin the economic aspects of the Belfast Agreement.

2.3 The North American Roadshow is the culmination of months of meticulous planning on the part of the Industrial Development Board and I acknowledge the personal involvement of the Chancellor, the Secretary of State, Economy Minister Mr Adam Ingram MP, Dr Alan Gillespie, Chairman of the IDB and IDB Chief Executive, Mr Bruce Robinson and our programme also included our attendance at the launch of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Overseas Market initiative in New York on 8 October also attended by Mr Roy Bailie the Chairman of the NITB.

2.4 By the end of the Programme it is estimated that 1,100 key decision-makers in North America will have been directly briefed on the investment opportunity represented by Northern Ireland.

2.5 Two major investments have already been secured during the Programme:

- Boston-based Segue have announced a world-wide technical support centre in Belfast, creating 45 jobs over the next 3 years.

- The major American insurance company Allstate Corporation, which has more than 20 million customers, has decided to establish a subsidiary in Northern Ireland which will create 250 new jobs. This will be the first off-shore IT operation for the Allstate Group.

2.6 The IDB have also announced the opening of its fourth representative office in the USA in Boston.

2.7 However the real success of programmes of this nature can only be measured over a period of years.

3. DEPARTMENTAL STRUCTURES

3.1 Turning to political developments, in our 14 September Interim Report to the Assembly we presented a summary of the initial views on Departmental structures expressed to us by the Parties during the course of a series of meetings in early September. In addition to comments made by Parties at the 14 September

Ministerial posts is something on which it will be important to have the views of the Parties.

3.4 The Deputy First Minister and I have taken time to reflect on the views already expressed to us by the Parties in the course of our earlier consultations with them and in the written submissions which we have subsequently received. In doing so, I think it would be right to say that we are conscious of the fact that there is still some distance to travel before a definitive set of proposals on Departmental structures and other issues can be arrived at. At the same time, we are both very conscious of the fact that we have been tasked by this Assembly to bring forward proposals on these and other matters. This is a responsibility in which we invest considerable significance.

3.5 I would like to take this opportunity to once again emphasise the commitment of the Deputy First Minister (Designate) and I to the implementation of the Belfast Agreement in all its aspects. We are committed to moving forward as quickly as possible to ensure that we discharge our responsibilities – not only to this Assembly but to the community at large in Northern Ireland.

3.6 Consequently, we have decided to initiate a further round of intensive consultations with all of the Parties in this Assembly. The purpose of these consultations will be to enable us to complete our work on the possible shape of a new Northern

Ireland administration and on the other institutions and areas of activity which the Agreement requires to be put in place. It is our intention to issue an invitation this evening to each of the Parties in the Assembly to participate in these consultations.

4. BRITISH-IRISH COUNCIL

4.1 I would now like to say something about the British-Irish Council.

4.2 Work is proceeding on this front also, and is the responsibility, because of the international nature of the subject matter, of the Constitution Unit of the Cabinet Office in London. At present 2 documents are in preparation. The first of these is a formal Memorandum of Understanding between the British and Irish Governments which will be necessary under the Belfast Agreement to bring the Council into operation. The second document is draft Procedural Guidance dealing with the administrative arrangements for the Council.

4.3 In addition, preparatory meetings have been held with the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man to explain the nature of the BIC. The Islands have indicated their willingness to participate in the Council. Since the new devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales will not come into existence until the summer of 1999, as a temporary arrangement the Secretaries of

State for Scotland and Wales will represent the Scottish and Welsh interest

4.4 We would welcome contributions from the Parties on how the work of this important new Council is to be taken forward. Our current assumption is that the first meeting of the Council in shadow form will take place in London at approximately the same time as the first meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council. Again, these and other practical matters can be discussed at the consultations which are to begin later this week.

4.5 I would now invite the Deputy First Minister (Designate) to address the Assembly.

5. INTRODUCTION (DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER DESIGNATE)

5.1 May I begin by expressing my heartiest congratulations to David and to John Hume on their well deserved joint award of this year's Nobel Peace Prize. This has brought great joy, pride and renewed spirit to those working for a new beginning in Northern Ireland.

5.2 We must now recognise the probability that despite our best efforts the 31st October - next Saturday - will pass without what should have happened by that date - the formation of the Executive, the inaugural meetings of the North-South

Ministerial Council and of the British-Irish Council. This is the price we are paying for the deadlock on Decommissioning. It is a very high price. The will of the people has been denied. You, the representatives of the people, have been denied your proper role and responsibility to form an Executive and to scrutinise its work. The date when the machinery of government comes under the control of locally elected politicians remains uncertain. When I consider the many serious problems facing Northern Ireland - the crisis in Agriculture, the uncertainty over our hospitals, the decline in business confidence, I feel a deep sense of frustration. We can hold debates and pass motions but if we are serious and want to be taken seriously then we must face up to and resolve with urgency the immediate issues blocking the way to the formation of the Executive, not just Decommissioning but agreeing the structures of government and the areas for North-South implementation and co-operation. The First Minister (Designate) has already covered what needs to be done as regards structures.

6. NORTH-SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

- 6.1 Let me now outline what has been happening as regards North-South questions and propose a way forward. Following the series of bilaterals with the parties in early September, we received a written submission from one party only: Sinn Fein. It is vital and urgent that other parties now make their views

known to us. The SDLP and the UUP have established a small working group. As members will recall, we have already placed in the Library a summary of the technical assessments, made by officials under the authority of Mr Murphy MP, of the 12 areas for co-operation and implementation listed in the Agreement. We have subsequently requested copies of the detailed assessments themselves together with detailed assessments of 11 further areas.

6.2 We have arranged today for copies of the completed technical assessments to be placed in the Library and shall arrange for the other assessments to be placed in library as they become available.

6.3 Officials have had a series of meetings with Irish government officials from the Departments of the Taoiseach and of Foreign Affairs. These have covered the preliminary steps to be taken in advance of the inaugural meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council including a draft Memorandum of Understanding setting out an agreed approach to the proceedings and operation of the Council and the possible venue and outline agenda for the inaugural meeting.

6.4 Meetings have also taken place between officials from Northern Ireland departments and Irish departmental officials in order to clarify issues arising from the technical assessments

undertaken referred to above and to allow the Irish Departments to present their views on technical matters associated with possible implementation bodies.

6.5 From the above it is clear that most of the necessary technical preparatory work is well advanced. What is now required is to step up the momentum of inter-party discussion on these matters and in particular the choice of areas for co-operation and implementation. This view is shared by both the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach.

6.6 We are therefore proposing, as for Departmental Structures, a further round of intensive consultations involving round table discussions and shall be issuing the appropriate invitations this evening to each of the Parties in the Assembly. This will allow us to speedily finalise the proposals which we shall put to the Assembly. The Prime Minister, the Taoiseach and their officials stand ready to help us in this task.

6.7 If we can get it right and find the best way to associate ourselves with the most successful economy in Europe - forecast to grow by over 10% this year - we will have performed a real service to our people and to the mutual benefit of both jurisdictions.

7. CIVIC FORUM

7.1 Let me now deal with the work under way as regards the Civic Forum. We are grateful to a number of parties who have made written submissions on this matter. We have also received a wide range of submissions from organisations and networks. Some common themes emerging are:

- **the Forum should complement the work of the Assembly and should not lend itself to the perception that it is in competition it or aspiring to second chamber status**
- **it should have no legislative, executive or administrative powers**
- **it should have a close working relationship with Assembly Committees in particular**
- **its membership should achieve a broad socio-economic, geographic, community and age spread and be gender balanced**
- **its core should be about 50 members**

- it should focus on a small number of key social, economic and cultural themes rather than seek to comment on all matters

- in addition to its regular meetings it should also meet periodically in different venues throughout Northern Ireland

- it should receive formal responses from Ministers to its recommendations.

Our officials are finalising a working document which takes account of this input and outlines the steps to be taken to establish the Forum.

7.2 We now see merit in intensifying on this basis our consultations with the Parties in advancing the establishment of the Civic Forum. In particular, advice is needed on

- Selection of members
- Draft Constitution and Standing Orders
- Possible work programme
- Administrative issues such as venue, secretariat

8. BRUSSELS CONFERENCE

- 8.1 The last point in my statement concerns the Brussels Conference on European Affairs. Next week the bulk of Assembly members will travel to Brussels as part of the Transitional Programme and as guests of the European Commission. This is yet another example of the enormous goodwill and interest in the new politics in Northern Ireland and is continued evidence of the commitment of the European Institutions to helping to resolve our problems.
- 8.2 During the visit we shall be meeting the President of the European Commission Jacques Santer together with the Secretary General Carlo Trojan both of whom have done so much for us in recent years. We shall also be meeting with Commissioner Wulf Mathies who has played a crucial role as regards Regional support and the Special Peace and Reconciliation Package. Other key meetings will involve Agriculture Commissioner Franz Fischler, Social Affairs Commissioner Pdraig Flynn and Transport Commissioner Neil Kinnock. In these meetings we must convey, as David and I have sought to do in the United States, that we are serious about building a new competitive, innovative, vibrant region here in Northern Ireland, that we are putting the stagnation and division of the past behind us and that we will be worthy partners in the construction of Europe. We