

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Meeting with Senator George Mitchell, London, 12 October 1999

1. George Mitchell briefed the British side and ourselves last night in London on how he proposes to handle this week's Review session. The British side was represented by Bill Jeffrey and Jonathan Stephens and I was accompanied by Tim O'Connor.

2. Mitchell is holding today's discussions with the UUP and Sinn Féin in the US Ambassador's Residence in Regent's Park. The meetings tomorrow and Friday involving the other parties will be held in Lancaster House. Mitchell sees today's meetings with the UUP/Sinn Féin as the most important of the Review to date. He asked both sides to keep their delegations small (four), but because David Trimble has insisted on bringing six, Gerry Adams is also bringing a larger group. The UUP side is Trimble, Reg Empey, Ken Maginnis, Michael McGimpsey, Alan McFarland and Danny Kennedy. The Sinn Féin delegation is Adams, Martin McGuinness, Aidan McAteer, Richard McAuley (Press), Gerry Kelly, Leo Green and Ted Howell.

3. Michell will begin with a collective session, at which he will seek to set a positive tone. He will stress that he wants business done and will insist that there can be no return to the mutual recriminations that have dominated the meetings so far. He will then meet each side separately in a smaller group (two each side). In order to focus thinking, he proposes to give each side at these meetings two preliminary papers (attached). The first is a draft of a general statement that he might make at the end of the Review, setting out the context in which a successful outcome might be set. The second is a draft of a statement of support for this approach that might be made by the participants. Using a series of questions, he would hope to build on these documents, putting the various elements of a possible outcome on the table progressively. A sample of the kind of questions he might pose is also attached (headed "Actions to be taken").

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4. In particular, he wants to table, at the right moment, a draft of the elements of a sequence. He discussed this with us last night. What he has in mind is based largely on the draft which we gave him last week as preliminary thinking on our side. We are working further on this with the British side this morning and will send back later today. No timings would be attached to the elements for now. Mitchell accepts our case that the possible timing of steps in the sequence is a crunch question and will have to be handled very carefully.

5. In essence, Mitchell has accepted the outline of the approach that we suggested in our preliminary paper of last week. He himself would make the call on what was needed, based on the requirements of political confidence, rather than formal obligations. Crucially, he would also make clear the reality that decommissioning was a voluntary act. The parties would give their support for this approach and there would be some form of guarantee (he has not yet worked out the details of the latter, but is favourably disposed towards the role for himself that we had envisaged, rather than going down the legislative route).

6. I should add that the attached papers are based on our own manuscript notes of what Mitchell told us last night. To fully preserve his independence, he asked that we not press him for a copy of what he was proposing to table, much of which was still in manuscript form. Instead, he agreed that we would take notes from his draft. He agreed to a number of amendments that we and the British side suggested.

Sinn Féin

7. We met Sinn Féin briefly at the end of the day. Martin McGuinness felt he had had a good meeting with the new Secretary of State that morning. Gerry Adams is to meet the Prime Minister tomorrow (Thursday). Adams in particular seemed pessimistic about the Review, claiming that it had been already going on for a considerable time with few if any signs of movement

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from the UUP. He was unconvinced that Trimble was committed to finding a way forward. We urged him to give the process every chance and to test the UUP to the maximum.

Dermot Gallagher
13 October 1999

cc Taoiseach, Minister, Minister of State, Mr Teahon, Dr Mansergh, Mr Dalton, Mr Bassett

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Statement by Senator Mitchell

Each party has confirmed its support for the Good Friday Agreement, the Mitchell Principles, and the three principles agreed by them on 25 June 1999.

There are differences of view between them on how these are to be implemented. Those differences of view are sincerely held. They reflect an absence of trust rather than a lack of commitment to the implementation of these commitments. Each side proclaims its sincerity, but doubts the other side. Mistrust prevents the growth of political confidence. Parties want devolution and decommissioning.

Decommissioning cannot be imposed. As General de Chastelain rightly says, it is a voluntary act. It is the important collective responsibility of parties to persuade the paramilitaries to decommission. Some parties have a particular responsibility in that regard. I call upon the paramilitaries to co-operate fully with the Decommissioning Commission.

On the basis of my discussions, I believe that appropriate words and deeds involving all of the parties may achieve the objectives of devolution and decommissioning and maintain confidence in the implementation of the Agreement.

The end of the year marks a new millennium. It is an appropriate time for a new era of peace and goodwill in Northern Ireland, and a new beginning to relations within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and among these islands.

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Statement of Support by the Participants

We affirm our support for the Good Friday Agreement and for the three principles agreed on 25 June.

We want a Northern Ireland of peace and reconciliation, a society where all citizens can live in tolerance, mutual respect, and in full equality. We want a new beginning in relationships between North and South on the island and between Britain and Ireland.

We renew our commitment to the Mitchell Principles. Consistent with those Principles, we pledge to use our influence to bring an end to the use, or threat, of force to achieve political goals.

We are mindful of, and profoundly regret, the suffering that has been endured by so many. From their grief, and from our shared sense of responsibility for the well-being of all our people, we resolve that never again will such pain afflict our societies.

We fully support Senator Mitchell's proposals as the way to secure full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and the three principles to which we are committed. We pledge that we will do all within our power to take these steps and to use our influence to ensure all of them are achieved. We believe that, working together, we [will/can] successfully achieve the implementation of all those steps.

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Actions to be Taken

[When fleshed out, this section would form part of Senator Mitchell's Statement]

[At Hillsborough in March, at Stormont in June and July, and throughout this Review, the parties have debated how to create the confidence needed on all sides to proceed to implement the Good Friday Agreement.

The heart of the matter is:

The UUP agree it is willing to establish an Executive, in which Sinn Féin would participate, provided there is a credible commitment to decommissioning and a start to the process, including an early act of decommissioning.

Sinn Féin says that it is willing to use its influence to try to bring about decommissioning, but that this must be part of a collective effort, and can only be achievable in the context of the institutions being up and running, pursuant to the Good Friday Agreement.

The question is:

Is there a sequence of words and deeds on which the parties can agree that will meet the needs of both (and all the other parties), and enable them to proceed with the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement?]

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