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SENATOR GEORGE MITCHELL SPEAKING AT A PRESS CONFERENCE HELD ON 22 JULY 199 AT CASTLE BUILDINGS

SENATOR MITCHELL

Well, good morning ladies and gentlemen, it's nice to see you all again. Unexpected for me but pleasant nonetheless. I will begin with a brief statement and then I'll be pleased to try to respond to your questions.

The Review process will resume on Monday the 6 September in accordance with the remit given to me by the Prime Ministers and I now quote from their statement:

> "The Review will take as its starting point the three principles agreed by all pro-Agreement Parties on the 25th June: an inclusive Executive exercising devolved powers, decommissioning of all paramilitary arms by May 2000, decommissioning to be carried out in a manner determined by the International Commission on Decommissioning and will determine how to overcome the difficulties which exist in the practical implementation of those principles. This will be its only focus."

I have met with all of the Parties, those who supported the Good Friday Agreement restated their support, those who opposed it restated their opposition. I hope that all will play a constructive role in the Review process and that the Review will lead to the full and timely implementation of the Agreement. I am convinced that the political leaders and the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland want peace, political stability and reconciliation. I will do all I can to help achieve those goals and with that now I'll be pleased to try to respond to your questions.

INTERVIEWER

Senator Mitchell, what's your response to the latest statement from the IRA?

SENATOR MITCHELL

I have read the statement, as well as the statements of the Prime Ministers and several of the political leaders. I've made it a practice not to comment on statements made by any individuals or organisations. We're going to go forward with this Review in good faith and as effectively as possible in an effort to achieve what I know the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland want, and that's peace, political stability and reconciliation. Without regard to that particular statement or to any other statement I repeat what I have said many times before: violence or the threat of violence will not solve the problems of

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Northern Ireland. The only way forward to peace, to political stability and to reconciliation is through democratic means, election and debate in which each person has a full and equal voice and through negotiation which is what this Review process is all about.

INTERVIEWER

Senator, did you significantly ..... sticking to the deadline on what they propose. in terms of the Review. Do you however have a timetable in which you will sort of benchmark the present failure in this project?

SENATOR MITCHELL

That's pretty timely, you've got a phone call right in the middle of a question. I (pause) I have not established and do not intend to establish a deadline but I believe consistent with the views expressed by the Prime Ministers that this Review should be tightly focused in both subject matter and time, and I do not have a precise time in mind but I've made it clear to the Prime Ministers and to all of the Parties that I do not intend this to be an open-ended process which will continue indefinitely, and so without trying to be more precise than that we're going to go forward in the, with the intention and in the expectation that this can be resolved in a prompt manner.

INTERVIEWER

Senator, have you an absolute freehand ..... are you absolutely free to deal ..... without ..... intervention or influence from outside?

SENATOR MITCHELL

I am not clear by what you mean by outside?

INTERVIEWER

(Unclear)

SENATOR MITCHELL

Well, the Prime Ministers of course are the ones who asked me to facilitate this Review and I expect that I will have a full and free independence in the conduct of the Review just as I had in the conduct of the negotiations and I have no qualms or reservations or concerns in that respect.

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INTERVIEWER

There is a propensity of some Parties to run off to see Prime Ministers in Northern Ireland. Do you guard against that?

SENATOR MITCHELL

Well, not only do I not wish to guard against their talking to Prime Ministers, I encourage the fullest possible consultation by all Parties. I know that some of them are meeting with the Prime Minister today and I think that's a good and helpful thing. I think the real key is once we get into the Review that the conduct of the proceedings be controlled in a way that doesn't have overlapping or separate channels of negotiation so that all of the actions wherever or however they occur have a single focus and objective and I'm fully satisfied that the Prime Ministers intend that and will comply with that.

INTERVIEWER

Senator Mitchell, you're being very positive and you always smile at us whenever you come into this building and we notice that to be honest it's a day that you dreaded you didn't want to have to come back here. You said fifteen months ago that it would be hard to get the deal to stick. What are your emotions coming back into the very room that the people, that the deal was signed?

SENATOR MITCHELL

Well, I make no, I want to phrase this properly so as to accurately to answer your question. I make no bones about the fact that I would have preferred not to come back. I had hoped and prayed that the Agreement would be fully and timely implemented, that no further participation by myself or others would be necessary. I think that is the hope and prayer of the people of Northern Ireland as well. At the same time as you know, I have said often, that I expected there would be difficulties. It would have been naive in the extreme for anyone to think that once the Agreement was reached that there was nothing more to do to except for it to somehow implement itself. So I'm not surprise at the difficulties, although I am disappointed at them, and I was surprised when I was asked by the Prime Ministers to return. I had no desire to do so. I do enjoy coming back to Northern Ireland, I want to make, make that distinction clear. I came back just two weeks ago in my role as Chancellor of Queen's University and had a pleasant time presiding over graduation ceremonies and at that time really didn't expect to be back for some months. So it is with personal reluctance that I accepted the invitation of the Prime Ministers but also a degree

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of personal commitment. I have a lot invested in a personal and emotional sense in Northern Ireland. As I said in my statement when I met with the Prime Ministers on Tuesday, I feel more and more like a member of this community. I feel as though this is in some sense my community as well as that of you and the other people who live here full time, and I think anyone when asked to help his or her community and is in a position to do so should respond. And so while I acknowledge that I was reluctant to come back and I don't look forward to spending weeks and weeks here in the Fall, it will be, it will be very inconvenient for me personally but that's a very small factor in relation to the larger and more meaningful objective of a durable and sustainable peace here. So I'm going to approach it with what I hope will be enthusiasm and energy, a full fledged effort, I will attempt to be as fair and impartial as I can to all of those who participate in the process, those Parties which supported the Agreement as well as those which opposed the Agreement and I've made very clear often in the past, and I repeat it here, it is a legitimate part of political debate for those Parties which oppose the Agreement to express and advocate their views and while I support the Agreement I acknowledge and respect the right of others in a democratic way to oppose it and will attempt to accommodate them in a fair and impartial way in the process as well. I think I answered your question, plus two others in the course of that one.

INTERVIEWER

Senator, while it is your practice not to comment on particular statements would you not care to express a view about the import of the IRA statement. It's one that clearly clouds the present climate and it must have an impact on the jobs you're doing?

SENATOR MITCHELL

I think my previous answer covered what I want to say on that subject.

I'll just take these last two right here, and that'll be it.

INTERVIEWER

I was just going to ask have you got any idea about the structures, formats for the way the talks will go ahead?

SENATOR MITCHELL

I've made no decision on that because I want time to reflect on the views expressed by the Parties yesterday and to consult with others in the process. I will make decisions well in

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advance of September 6 as to the precise time, location, structure and format. But all of those are matters which I will now take under advice following the, I think I had a eleven meetings yesterday and the day before, I received a rather wide range of views and I want to give time for consideration of those views.

You have absolutely the last word.

INTERVIEWER

I think that everyone is aware that is the last numerous, intensive efforts to resolve ..... How do you see this process actually being moved forward, what view can you bring to it and .....

SENATOR MITCHELL

Of course, that precise question could have been asked and was asked at the beginning of the negotiations in June of 1996. It could have been asked and was asked at various stages in that process. There was little reason to believe that an agreement could be reached. Indeed public opinion polls showed that the large majority of people felt that there could be no agreement, but we approached and approached it and pursued it in the belief and with the determination that we could get an agreement. Now I acknowledge to you that your question is appropriate, it's timely, that much has happened from which one could draw the conclusion that there's no prospect here but I don't believe that. I believe that we can take action which will lead to full and timely implementation of the Agreement. That's why I'm here and I'll do the best I can in a fair and appropriate way to accomplish that objective. I am not able to cite to you any specific statement made by anyone which I can say is conclusive proof that that's going to happen, just as I could not have done so at any point during the two years of negotiations. But I believe in my heart and soul that this can be done, that the will of the people of Northern Ireland is for peace and political stability and reconciliation and I believe that this is the best way to achieve those goals. Now you really do have the last word.

INTERVIEWER

Thank you very much sir. You got it spot on on Good Friday last year. You said implementing it would be as difficult as reaching agreement, therefore I ask you is this the last chance now. Is this Review the end of it and where did it all go wrong?

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SENATOR MITCHELL

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Well, I think it will take time and perspective and the wisdom and judgement of historians to answer those questions in the kind of detail that they deserve, and I don't feel that I am the appropriate person to try to do that.

INTERVIEWER

With all due respects I think you can. You were asked a few months ago, you said it would be difficult .....?

SENATOR MITCHELL

But I don't think was alone in sharing that view and I believe that it was in fact a common-sense assessment of the situation which existed at the time. Without attempting to be argumentative or quarrelsome I wouldn't use the words 'where did it all go wrong'. I think that substantial progress has been made a long way remains. I think it's important to emphasise that this, even when resolved, will not be the last obstacle to a durable and sustainable peace. There are other important issues, there other decisions, there will be further controversies. The conflict lasted a long time. Establishing a durable peace and achieving genuine reconciliation will also take a long time and I think it's going to take patience, determination and perseverance by all concerned, especially the political leaders of Northern Ireland and the Prime Ministers, and the people of Northern Ireland. I believe it can be done and I am determined to do all I can to see it through.

Thank you all very much for being here today.

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