

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Meetings between Taoiseach and British Prime Minister with the Parties, 6 May 1999

Steering Note

Background

1. The meeting is in follow-up to the session held by the Taoiseach and Prime Minister with the UUP, the SDLP and Sinn Féin in Downing St on 19 April. Building on intensive private contacts which we have been having with Sinn Féin over the past week or so (see material in this brief), it is hoped that real progress can be made on breaking the impasse, even if an actual breakthrough will likely require further work thereafter.

Blair's Position

2. Blair believes that Trimble will require "two jumps", that a breakthrough cannot be achieved in one go. He seems to envisage a Sinn Féin statement leading to the establishment of a Shadow Executive, and subsequently an IRA statement leading to the full Executive.

Our Position

3. We would be deeply concerned about any formula which would put off the establishment of the institutions proper until after the Summer. Our worry is that a Shadow process would simply not survive the very difficult period ahead (marching season, divisive European elections, etc). This is a view strongly shared, *inter alia,* by Séamus Mallon and Gerry Adams.

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4. We are encouraged by the movement forward that has been made in the Sinn Féin position, as conveyed to us yesterday by Gerry Adams (see note in this brief). In terms of their position to date, this represents a significant development. However, as matters stand, Adams is proposing a Sinn Féin statement only. Our view is that, in addition, we need either an IRA statement or a very clear understanding on timing, perhaps with some of the strain being carried by de Chastelain.

Trimble

5. Blair is essentially pragmatic in all of this. We believe that if he is convinced that the language from Sinn Féin is sufficiently forward (in tandem with de Chastelain's input), he will strongly seek to persuade Trimble to make the leap and agree to the establishment of the full Executive at this time.

6. The suggested approach undoubtedly holds deep difficulties for Trimble. Effectively, the formula would require him to enter into the Executive without a start to decommissioning, something which would be in stark contradiction to the repeated position he has taken on the issue throughout. We cannot underestimate the problems which such a move would cause him in his party; there must be real question marks about whether he could take them with him. On the other hand, we know that he is deeply keen to find a way through - he recognises how vulnerable he will be if he has to face the Summer period without a breakthrough. There remains, therefore, an albeit outside chance that if the language from the republican side is sufficiently new and forward, allied to de Chastelain's input, Trimble might be prepared to, and be able to pull off, the gamble of going for the full Executive now. It is indeed a long shot, but represents the only approach on the horizon that has the remotest chance of bringing us a breakthrough in the short-term.

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Next Steps

7. We will be meeting at official level at lunchtime with Sinn Féin and will subsequently be joined by British officials. The situation will have to be re-assessed after these meetings in advance of the Taoiseach's opening session with the Prime Minister.

8. Finally, on the issue of participation at the Downing St meetings, we would strongly favour the inclusion of the PUP (in particular), the Women's Coalition and the Alliance. The British side are not particularly keen on their attendance, but, in our view, the balance of advantage lies strongly with having them present. At the very minimum, there should be conference telephone contact with them, but ideally, we feel, they should be present - if necessary they could be seen by the Taoiseach and Prime Minister collectively, thus cutting down on meeting time.

Dermot Gallagher
5 May 1999

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Summary of meeting with Gerry Adams and Aidan McAteer

Belfast, 4 May 1999

1. Adams, referring to our discussions in Dublin the previous Saturday and Monday, said that we were not going to get an IRA statement, and certainly not in the language we had sought. He emphasised that we should not in any way underestimate the depth of cynicism on the ground in Republican areas; he himself had been taken aback at the extent of this over the Easter period.

2. On the other hand, Adams said that he, as President of Sinn Féin, would be prepared to "stick my neck out" in a statement that would go substantially further than anything Sinn Féin had said up to now. This statement could, however, only be made in the context of a "clear choreography" leading to the very early establishment of all the institutions of the Agreement.

3. I repeated and emphasised our view that an IRA statement would be required to meet the needs of the situation. We would, of course, give full consideration to any statement from Sinn Féin but needed to see the actual words before making a judgement. Adams then handed over the attached (which is almost in identical text to that drafted by us and handed over to him last week). In addition to the attached words, Adams said he would be prepared, either separately or more likely as part of this statement, to say something along the lines that, in the context of the institutions being up and running, the Leadership of Sinn Féin believed they could bring about decommissioning. I responded that this was undoubtedly a significant advance but, in my view, nonetheless did not go far enough. What timeframe, for instance, was envisaged? Was it the timeframe of the Agreement? Adams said we could talk about this in London.

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4. The situation now is that Sinn Féin will meet us at official level in London at lunchtime today (Wednesday). Following this bilateral meeting, both sides will get together with British officials this afternoon.

Dermot Gallagher

5 May 1999

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Recd from T. Adams 4/5/99 PG

Possible Statement by Sinn Féin President

Draft: 4 May '99

Sinn Fein are totally committed to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in all its aspects. As I said in my statement on 2 September 1998, we believe that the whole-hearted implementation of the Agreement has the capacity to transform the existing situation through constructive and dynamic political development. It is a matter of the deepest regret and frustration to Sinn Fein, and indeed to all who voted for the Agreement on 22 May last, that the process of implementation has been repeatedly stalled.

In this context, much attention has been paid to the arms issue. Sinn Fein wish to re-state our position on the matter. Our objective is to achieve total disarmament and the complete removal of all weapons from politics in Ireland. Decommissioning will come about when all sides have created the conditions for it to be undertaken. The issue of arms must be finally and satisfactorily settled.

The issue is addressed directly in the Good Friday Agreement. All parties to the Agreement are required to work constructively and in good faith with the deChastelain Commission and to use any influence we may have to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within the timeframe set down in the Agreement in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement. Sinn Fein are committed to discharging our responsibilities under the Agreement in this regard. As an earnest of that commitment, Sinn Fein appointed Martin McGuinness as our representative to meet with the deChastelain Commission and he has done so constructively on behalf of our party. We will continue to work closely with the Commission.

In addressing the arms issue, it is critical to bear in mind the context required for its resolution. The Good Friday Agreement makes clear that this context is the implementation of the overall settlement, using the mechanism of the deChastelain Commission as set out in the Agreement. Any objective analysis of the twelve months since the signing of the Agreement reveals that its operation has not been

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proceeding in the manner or timescale set out in its terms.

We acknowledge that there are real concerns and fears surrounding the issue of arms and, in the interest of stability, these must be addressed in resolving the issue. There are valid and strongly-held reasons why many on both sides view the decommissioning issue with deep suspicion and why for them this notion is surrounded by such profound difficulty.

The arms issue is, of course, also a sympton of the wider conflict. Despite the difficulties that have been encountered, there is no doubt that we are entering into the final stages of the resolution of that conflict. There is an onus on all political leaderships, especially the British Government, to bring this to a democratic settlement. We welcome the IRA's statement of 31 March. Taken with the ceasefire which has now been in place for an aggregate period of over three years, this statement represents another important and positive contribution by the IRA to the resolution of the conflict.

The challenge for all of us is to break the cycle of mistrust and replace it with real, mutual trust, so that everybody can go forward in confidence, on the basis of equality and partnership. That is the essence of the Good Friday Agreement and that is why its full implementation is the best guarantee that guns will never again have a role in the politics of this island. Token decommissioning would not provide the same guarantee.

The two Governments, in particular the British Government, have a major responsibility in securing a satisfactory outcome to the issue of arms. Historically, the British Government have been a hugely negative factor in the development of the conditions of conflict in Ireland and they must now play a central role in the creation of a future on this island in which the gun has no place.

We look forward to full participation in the new institutions, based on our mandate. In addition to the new all-Ireland institutions, Sinn Fein Ministers will play a constructive part in the new Northern Executive. The two Sinn Fein Ministers in the Executive will make and will honour the pledge of office including the commitment to

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non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means.

Sinn Fein believe, as stated, that the only context in which the decommissioning issue can be addressed and real progress made towards its resolution is that of the implementation of the Agreement as a whole, including the operation of its institutions. There is no justification for any further delay in proceeding with the establishment of those institutions. Sinn Fein are convinced that it is only through the full implementation of the Agreement, including the operation of its institutions and discharging our collective responsibilities in regards to its terms, under the aegis of the deChastelain Commission as set out in the Agreement, that the issue of arms will be finally and satisfactorilly settled. Sinn Fein solemnly commit ourselves to work with the other pro-Agreement parties, the two Governments and the deChastelain Commission to use all our influence to that end as set out in the Agreement.

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Possible Statement by the Leadership of Óglaigh na hÉireann

The leadership and volunteers of Óglaigh na hÉireann are committed to achieving a united, independent Ireland. In this new phase of our struggle, we have sought to encourage, through the complete cessation of all military activities, a coherent political strategy whose purpose is to remove all the causes of conflict and facilitate a durable peace settlement on this island.

Our community sees substantial potential in the Good Friday Agreement, if fully implemented, to bring about real and meaningful change in the quality of their lives, to advance republican objectives and to establish a new dispensation in Ireland. But they are fearful that their rights and their lives remain at risk. The experience of the nationalist community on the Garvaghy Road, the murder of Rosemary Nelson and the ongoing campaign of intimidation against nationalists have shown that those fears are well founded. There is an obligation on everyone, but particularly on the British Government, to face up to their responsibilities to address and resolve these issues.

We recognise also the fears of unionists. The decommissioning issue has been used to heighten their fears at the expense of the positive contribution which the IRA has made to the peace process through its cessation of military operations and its encouragement of engagement in a new coherent strategy for peace. The IRA shares and endorses Sinn Féin's search for a working political relationship with unionists leading toward genuine reconciliation and partnership on the island of Ireland. It believes that the Good Friday Agreement has the potential to advance that relationship through the establishment of the Agreement's institutions, and that conflict damages that relationship.

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We reiterate that the decommissioning of its arms remains a matter for the IRA.

We support Sinn Féin's commitment to pursuing conflict resolution through exclusively peaceful and democratic means. We recognise the political value of the Good Friday Agreement, when fully implemented, to help establish the objective conditions for a lasting peace. Establishing that peace involves the removal of all the guns from the politics of this island. The arms of Óglaigh na hÉireann are already silent and out of use and, in this context, as far as we are concerned, they will remain so. The conditions for lasting peace can best be advanced through the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. It is our firm intention to act in a way which would underpin the stability of that process.

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Possible Statement by Sinn Féin President

Sinn Féin are totally committed to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in all its aspects. As I said in my statement on 2 September 1998, we believe that the whole-hearted implementation of the Agreement has the capacity to transform the existing situation through constructive and dynamic political development. It is a matter of the deepest regret and frustration to Sinn Féin, and indeed to all who voted for the Agreement on 22 May last, that the process of implementation has been repeatedly stalled.

In this context, much attention has been paid to the arms issue. Sinn Féin wish to re-state our position on the matter. Our objective is to achieve total disarmament and the complete removal of all weapons from our politics in Ireland. The issue of arms must be finally and satisfactorily settled.

The issue is addressed directly in the Good Friday Agreement. Sinn Féin are committed to discharging our responsibilities under the Agreement in this regard, namely to work constructively and in good faith with the de Chastelain Commission, and to use our influence, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons within the timeframe set down in the Agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement. As an earnest of that commitment, Sinn Féin appointed Martin McGuinness as our representative to meet with the de Chastelain Commission and he has done so constructively on behalf of the party in the interim. We will continue to work closely with the Commission.

In addressing the arms issue, it is critical to bear in mind the context required for its resolution. The Good Friday Agreement makes clear that this context is the implementation of the overall settlement, using the mechanism of the de Chastelain Commission. Any objective analysis of the twelve months since the signing of the

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Agreement reveals that its operation has not been proceeding in the manner or timescale set out in its terms.

We acknowledge that there are real concerns and fears within both communities surrounding the issue of arms and, in the interest of stability, these must be addressed in resolving the issue. There are valid and strongly-held reasons why many on both sides view the decommissioning issue with deep suspicion and why for them this notion is surrounded by such profound difficulty.

The arms issue is, of course, also a symptom of the wider conflict. Despite the difficulties that have been encountered, there is no doubt that we are entering into the final stages of the resolution of that conflict. We welcome the IRA statement of [date]. Taken with the ceasefire which has now been in place for an aggregate period of over three years, this statement represents another important and positive contribution by the IRA to the resolution of the conflict.

The challenge for all of us is to break the cycle of mistrust and replace it with real, mutual trust, so that everybody can go forward in confidence, on the basis of equality and partnership. That is the essence of the Good Friday Agreement and that is why its full implementation is the best guarantee that guns will never again have a role in the politics of this island. Token decommissioning would not provide the same guarantee.

The two Governments, in particular the British Government, have a major responsibility in securing a satisfactory outcome to the issue of arms. Historically, the British Government have been a hugely negative factor in the development of the conditions of conflict in Ireland and they must now play a central role in the creation of a future on this island in which the gun has no place.

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We look forward to full participation in the new institutions, based on our mandate. In addition to the new all-Ireland institutions, Sinn Féin Ministers will play a constructive part in the new Northern Executive. We fully accept that any party in that Executive which dishonoured its Pledge of Office, including the commitment to non-violence and exclusively democratic and peaceful means, would, under the terms of section 25 of Strand One of the Agreement, be effectively automatically expelling itself from the Executive.

Sinn Féin believe, as stated, that the only context in which the decommissioning issue can be satisfactorily resolved is that of the implementation of the Agreement as a whole, including the operation of its institutions. There is no justification for any further delay in proceeding with the establishment of those institutions. Sinn Féin are convinced that it is only through the full implementation of the Agreement, including the operation of its institutions, that the implementation of the decommissioning element of the Agreement, under the aegis of the de Chastelain Commission, will be brought about. Sinn Féin solemnly commit ourselves to work with the other pro-Agreement parties, the Governments and the de Chastelain Commission, and to use all our influence to that end within the timeframe set out in the Agreement.

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De Chastelain Statement -- Operative Paragraph

16. In conclusion, and in my capacity as Chairman of the Independent Commission, I would make the following judgement: The key to decommissioning lies in the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in all its aspects. On the basis of our consultations, I am satisfied that, in the context of the full implementation of the Agreement, and in particular of the operation of all its institutions, the conditions would then be progressively established for parties to use their influence to achieve decommissioning as set down in the Agreement. Moreover, it is my judgement that a valuable and tangible start has already been made to the process of decommissioning by the fact that complete and unequivocal ceasefires remain firmly in place, and that the weapons of the paramilitary organisations are silent and out of use.

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Possible Statement by David Trimble

The Ulster Unionist Party is committed to the successful implementation of the Belfast Agreement. We believe that this is in the interests of all of the people of Northern Ireland, specifically including those of the pro-union majority. Under the Agreement, locally-accountable government is to be restored to our province, giving us direct control over those socio-economic issues which most affect our quality of life. The democratic deficit will be closed. There will be practical, down-to-earth co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, firmly rooted in close accountability to the Assembly. The British-Irish Council will give expression to the wider community of interests within the British Isles.

Furthermore, the imposed Anglo-Irish Agreement will be scrapped. And the Republic's illegal claim over the territory of Northern Ireland will be removed from its Constitution. Nationalism and republicanism have had to sign up definitively to the principle of consent.

All of these are massive gains. Of course we have had to accept other, less desirable elements of the Agreement. But the overall balance, above all of the longer-term aspects, is firmly in our favour. The prize at stake is a Northern Ireland at peace with itself and squarely within the Union. It will be a new Northern Ireland, based on partnership and reconciliation between unionists and nationalists, Catholics and Protestants : but a new Northern Ireland whose constitutional future will be all the more secure because we will be working together. We unionists should have the self-confidence to see that it is our opponents - now sitting in a Stormont assembly, within the United Kingdom - who have had to make the most fundamental compromises.

To be realised, our bright vision of the future requires the entry into force of all of the institutions provided for in the Agreement. As First Minister designate, I have always

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made clear my desire to lead an Executive incorporating all those parties with sufficient popular support to be represented on it. At the same time, I have refused to sit down with those about whose true commitment to peace and democracy there are serious doubts. I will not work with unreconstructed terrorists. But equally, we have never said that those with a past may not have a future.

The judgement I am called upon to make is a difficult one. The transition from a past of violence to a future of peace is never simple. I am now reasonably confident, however, on the basis of [the statements from the Chairman of the International Commission on Decommissioning, John de Chastelain, from Sinn Féin and from the IRA], and of my own assessment of developments, including through dialogue with the leadership of Sinn Féin, that the long republican war is now definitively at an end - having failed definitively to achieve its objectives. I am also satisfied that the republican movement, after months and years of equivocation, recognises the obligation upon it to disarm in line with the provisions of the Agreement. I would have wished that it make this clearer by an initial clear demonstration of its good faith through an act of prior decommissioning. But I have sufficient confidence that it will soon make a start in fulfilling its obligations.

On that basis, I am now prepared to move ahead to the formation of an Executive Committee. Should my judgement of the intentions of Sinn Féin and the IRA turn out to be incorrect, I will expect the two Governments and the SDLP to take the action required to remove Sinn Féin from office, as they have undertaken to do. I personally will resign my office, and recommend to the Ulster Unionist Party that it leave the Executive, should these commitments be dishonoured.

I am well aware that many unionists will oppose or question my decision. That is their prerogative. But I ask two simple questions. Would the course they have recommended, of a unionism standing aloof and refusing to engage, have brought us in any way towards the achievement of our objectives? And have they any coherent

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alternative, likely to win broad support in Northern Ireland and the endorsement of our Government?

The Ulster Unionist Party is the natural leader of government in Northern Ireland. Governing requires hard decisions. None could be more difficult than that I have now had to make. I call upon my colleagues and supporters to back me and to work to ensure that Northern Ireland has the future its people deserve. The failure of the Belfast Agreement would not serve the long-term interests of the people of Northern Ireland, or of the unionist tradition.

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