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Ms Whelan
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Sinn Féin Press Office
Conway Mill
5 - 7 Conway Street
Belfast
BT13 2DA
tel: 230261
fx: 231723

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Good Friday Agreement
The Only Way Forward

Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams MP this morning held a press conference in Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

Mr Adams was accompanied by colleagues from the Sinn Féin leadership, including Mitchel McLaughlin, Sean Crowe, Martin Ferris, Bairbre de Brún, Lucilita Breathnach, Arthur Morgan, Gerry Kelly, Pat Doherty.

The Sinn Féin leader set out Sinn Féin's current assessment of the state of the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr Adams said:
No-one should underestimate the depth or seriousness of the crisis we are facing.

The success of the UUP in preventing the transfer of power and the establishment of the institutions two weeks ago - a period of some 15 months since the Good Friday Agreement was signed - is a damaging blow against the Good Friday Agreement.

It is clear that the UUP does not want change, except on its own terms.

The primary responsibility for the failure to implement the Agreement in key areas lies ultimately with the British government.

The reality is that the peace process cannot be successful if it is subject to a unionist veto. The Good Friday Agreement will never deliver on its undoubted potential if its implementation is filtered through unionism.

While Sinn Féin is justifiably critical of the British government we have

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acknowledged and commended the positive way that Mr Blair approached the peace process.

Republicans understand the historic nature and the monumental shifts which are required if the peace process is to succeed, It cannot succeed without Tony Blair. He holds the key.

The Assembly is not that envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement. It has no powers, no Executive, no committees. It cannot even meet.

On the ground there has been:

- no progress on the equality agenda.
- no progress on demilitarisation
- no freedom to live free from sectarian harassment
- no new policing service. The RUC remains unchanged, unable and unwilling to root out the culture of collusion seen most starkly in the murder of solicitor Rosemary Nelson and the most recent revelations about the murder of Pat Finucane.

It is important to recall that in September 1997, David Trimble declared that he was not going in to Castle Buildings to negotiate with Sinn Féin, he was going in to put Sinn Féin out.

Since then he has casually made and then reneged on one agreement after another, in terms of the north/south institutions on 2nd and 18th December, and on the setting up of the Executive in Downing Street on 14th May. He walked through one deadline after another, 31st October, 10th March, 29th March, 22nd May, June 30th, July 2nd until he ensured the failure of efforts to establish the institutions two weeks ago.

Under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement the only requirement for Executive office is sufficient electoral support. A further renegotiation of this issue to meet UUP demands is totally unacceptable.

- It is essential that the two governments proceed with the other elements of the Agreement.

- Given the faltering approach of the British government to date there is a particular onus on the Irish government to continue to energetically pursue the implementation of these aspects of the Agreement, to defend and advance the rights of all Irish citizens and of the people of Ireland as a

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whole.

- In addition the two governments must seek to ensure that the UUP fulfil its obligations under the terms of the agreement or, failing this, ensure the establishment, under their auspices, of meaningful institutions, including a range of all-Ireland policy and implementation bodies.

- The Good Friday Agreement is British government policy. They have a responsibility to implement the Agreement as negotiated.

- If it is to be objective, genuine and within the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, the review must address the failure to establish the political institutions. It must examine the causes of the breakdown, including a close examination of the role played by the British government, and it must ultimately identify the source of the breakdown and how, within the terms of the Good Friday Agreement it should be overcome.

- Because of the widespread belief that the UUP will seek to protract the September review the Ard Chomhairle declined, at this time, to make a firm decision on whether or not Sinn Fein would participate.

- The Ard Chomhairle also decided to engage in a substantive round of discussion with the UUP over the coming weeks. We are seeking a range of meetings with the UUP, at various level, both formal and informal, in a concerted attempt to find a way forward. In order to facilitate these discussions we are prepared to conduct these meetings in private.

- On decommissioning the Agreement makes clear that addressing this issue is dependant on two key elements:
  - a collective responsibility on all participants to work in good faith with the International Commission; and
  - the implementation of the overall agreement.

- There is no singular responsibility on Sinn Fein or any one party to bring about decommissioning. It is collective responsibility on all participants and one which Sinn Fein fully accepts and has acted on. We acknowledge the obligation to work in good faith to bring decommissioning about.

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- Any attempt to exclude Sinn Fein over the issue of decommissioning is beyond the terms of the Agreement and would be totally unacceptable.

- This process still remains the best chance for peace this century. If it is to succeed all participants must refocus so that the Agreement is implemented. Only the British government can create the conditions which will bring this about.

- The Good Friday Agreement provides the only way forward. It cannot be renegotiated at the behest of unionism. For Sinn Fein it the absolute bottomline.

This is the full text of Gerry Adams article:

Good Friday Agreement Only Way Forward: Adams

From the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998 until the UUP prevented the transfer of power and the establishment of the institutions two weeks ago - a period of almost 16 months - the peace process has limped from one unionist induced crisis to another.

This period of time could have been used to fulfil the huge expectations generated by the all-Ireland referenda in May of last year. It could have been a period during which the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement took hold, when Irish nationalists, unionists and the British stepped towards each other in an effort to put behind us the enmity resulting from centuries of conflict.

It could have been a time when former enemies gave space to each other to learn new ways of thinking, of speaking, of trying to understand one another. A time of certainty and decisive, forward looking leadership to demonstrate that we had opened a new

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chapter in Irish-British history - one of compromise, tolerance and genuine reconciliation.

Instead the last 16 months will be remembered as a time of recrimination, of bitterness, of the sharp word.

The failure to establish the Executive and the all-Ireland Ministerial Council is a damaging blow against the Good Friday Agreement. That failure sent shockwaves through popular opinion here, in Britain and the U.S. It causes uncertainty about the future. At a time when politics must be seen to work, to deliver change, we have a political vacuum which remains unfilled.

What we are dealing with here is not a blip but the possible melt-down of the political conditions that led to the Good Friday Agreement.

While the UUP leadership caused the breakdown in the Executive and the other institutions, their approach is totally consistent with their own narrow interests. The UUP does not want change, except on its own terms. Nationalists and republicans seek to manage change, change which is essential if there is to be justice. Unionism seeks only to limit or prevent that change.

Unionism has not moved beyond the politics of intransigence and obstruction because, up to this point, it has not needed to. The politics of intransigence and obstruction have worked. The British government have pandered to negative unionism, have not defended the Agreement which the British government and the UUP signed up to and have allowed the UUP to set the pace.

As so often in the past, and with such disastrous consequences, the UUP and the securocrats are effectively dictating the British government's tactical approach on Ireland.

The Peace Process

Almost daily since August 1994 people throughout Ireland have lived and breathed the most intricate details of the latest crisis in the

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peace process. Worn down or turned off by the negative arguments used quite blatantly by unionism to rob the process of its potential, it is easy to forget what this process is really about, where it came from and what it was designed to achieve.

Sinn Féin's commitment to this process goes back more than a decade and was signaled publicly with the publishing of *'Towards a Lasting Peace'* in 1991. It set out the basis of a strategy which Sinn Féin believed could resolve the causes of conflict and deliver a lasting peace settlement.

The publication of this discussion document was followed by many initiatives which republicans have taken both unilaterally and along with others in nationalist Ireland and abroad in pursuit of this strategy.

Most critical among these were the talks between John Hume and Gerry Adams in 1993/1994, which kick-started the peace process, and the IRA cessations of 1994 and 1997, and which created the best opportunity for peace in Ireland this century.

Even in the wake of the IRA cessations, and despite their dramatic impact on the political climate, the British government adhered to the old agenda with increased demands on republicans and the offensive demand for a so-called decontamination period.

Furthermore despite the risk of a destabilising effect on our own constituency we sought and secured our party's support for the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This required that we amend our party's constitution and removed a 75 year ban on members taking seats in any 6 County Assembly.

For almost 16 months we have continuously used our influence positively to effect it's full implementation.

Most recently, in the Castle Building discussions in late June, we took a further initiative in an attempt to overcome the impasse. This initiative, which was described by the two governments as a seismic shift, was rejected repeatedly by the UUP.

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British Government Stewardship

Despite the negative approach of unionism towards the Good Friday Agreement, the primary responsibility for the failure to implement it in key areas lies ultimately with the British government. The failure of David Trimble to lead his party into the structures which he agreed on Good Friday 1998 cannot be used as an excuse by the British government to evade it's responsibilities as a participant and as one of the two governments charged with overseeing the implementation of the Agreement

By indulging David Trimble in his delaying strategy and by pandering to unionist rejectionism the British government has encouraged that intransigence.

The Good Friday Agreement promised a new beginning for everyone on this island. Sinn Féin persuaded our party and our electorate to support it on the basis that it established inclusive structures with a strong All-Ireland aspect and that it would be working to an agenda of justice, equality and change.

16 months later none of the institutions has been put in place. Even the Assembly, which has been in a limbo existence since 25 June last year, is not that envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement. It has no powers, no Executive, no statutory committees. It cannot even meet, and has not met since March, save for that one desperate attempt to breath life into its structures on July 15 this year, a meeting which, bizarrely, was boycotted by its own First Minister David Trimble.

On the ground there has been no progress on the equality agenda in terms of its effect on the day to day lives of people. There has been no progress on demilitarisation with the British government yet to fulfil even the minimal requirement to publish a 'normalisation' paper.

The people of the Garvaghy Road and other isolated nationalist

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communities have yet to see evidence of their right to live free from sectarian harassment. Repressive legislation has not been repealed but strengthened.

The RUC remains unchanged, unable and unwilling to root out the culture of collusion between its members and loyalist paramilitaries and unwilling to challenge wrong-dong within the force. This was seen most starkly in the murder of solicitor Rosemary Nelson and the most recent revelations about the murder of Pat Finucane. Rosemary Nelson's murder was part of a catalogue of sectarian loyalist attacks, including several murders, since the Good Friday Agreement.

There is a deep commitment in the republican and nationalist community to the peace process. But there is also deep anger that the Good Friday Agreement - a product of the peace process - has been blocked at every juncture by unionism with the indulgence of the British government.

We have seen a succession of missed deadlines and broken agreements.

On 1 July 1998 David Trimble was elected First Minister and Seamus Mallon Deputy First Minister. On 20 July in the House of Commons David Trimble made his intentions clear when he said he would seek to have Sinn Féin excluded from office in any Executive. The summer passed with no Executive formed.

It was not until 10 September, over two months after his election as First Minister, that David Trimble agreed to meet Gerry Adams.

The all-Ireland bodies were due to be established through the shadow Ministerial Council by 31 October. Because of Unionist refusal to enter an Executive this deadline was missed. Expectations that this would be done before David Trimble and John Hume accepted their Nobel Peace Prizes on 10 December were also dashed.

On 13 January a new deadline was set by the British government for 10 March 1999. Once again this deadline was allowed to pass. Five days later Rosemary Nelson was murdered.

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A new deadline of the week beginning the 29 March was set to ensure that the institutions were established before the first anniversary of the Agreement on 10 April. Once more the deadline passed.

Yet another deadline, an absolute deadline the British government told us was set for 30 June. That ended with the collapse of the Executive at Stormont on 15 July.

At every turn the British government has compounded the crisis by pandering to unionism and effectively rewriting the Agreement. Rather than acknowledging and responding positively David Trimble has used every available opportunity to obstruct progress and prevent meaningful change.

The UUP

David Trimble's approach to the peace processs should have come as no surprise. It had been well signalled. When, in September 1997, he walked into the negotiations at Castle Buildings flanked by representatives of the UDA and the UVF he declared that he was not going in to negotiate with Sinn Féin, that he was going in to put Sinn Féin out. Since then his strategy has been to assert unionist domination and control of the political process by imposing the unionist veto.

Rather than seek an accommodation with Sinn Fein, his strategy has been to secure the exclusion of Sinn Fein.

Having reluctantly signed up to the Good Friday agreement he has sought at every available opportunity to reduce its impact.

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He casually made and then reneged on one agreement after another, in terms of the all-Ireland institutions on 2nd and 18th December, and on the setting up of the Executive in Downing Street on 14th May. He walked through one deadline after another, 31st October, 10th March, 29th March, 22nd May, June 30th, July 2nd until he collapsed the institutions two weeks ago.

He sought concession after concession and always beyond the terms of the Agreement. Once given, he sought more.

He ran behind the 'NO' camp instead of standing by the Good Friday agreement and giving leadership to those inside unionism who want tot look forward not backwards.

In competition with other strands of unionism for political leadership David Trimble has presided over a lurch to the right inside his own and other smaller unionist parties.

He has moved the UUP to an anti-agreement, rejectionist position. He put party political concerns above the needs of the Good Friday Agreement, above the needs of the peace process.

David Trimble has succeeded in blocking progress and collapsing the institutions. But the responsibility is not his alone.

The British government needs to rectify the situation by changing its tactical approach. Tony Blair must ensure that the unionist writ is confined to Glengall Street and doesn't run in Downing Street. The reality is that the peace process cannot be successful if it is subject to a unionist veto. The Good Friday Agreement will never deliver on its undoubted potential if its implementation is filtered through unionism.

Review

On Saturday, July 24, against this difficult backdrop, the Sinn Fein negotiating team reported to the Sinn Fein Ard Chomhairle on the preliminary discussions with Senator Mitchell and last weeks meeting with the British government.

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The Ard Chomhairle took the view that the refusal of the UUP to share power with nationalists and republicans, and the consequent collapse of the Executive, requires urgent and immediate action by the two governments. It is in our view essential that the two governments proceed with the other elements of the Agreement.

Given the faltering approach of the British government to date there is a particular onus on the Irish government to continue to energetically pursue the implementation of these aspects of the Agreement, to defend and advance the rights of all Irish citizens and of the people of Ireland as a whole.

In addition the two governments must seek to ensure that the UUP fulfil its obligations under the terms of the agreement or, failing this, ensure the establishment, under their auspices, of meaningful institutions, including a range of all-Ireland policy and implementation bodies.

But there is only one area of the Agreement which has totally broken down and this is in regards to the political institutions. This is the area that the review should address and this is the difficulty which it must overcome.

The Ard Chomhairle agreed that any review should examine the areas of non-implementation and ensure that these are effectively dealt with. However, deep concern was repeatedly expressed that the review would become, at the insistence of the UUP, the cover for yet another renegotiation on the establishment of the political institutions - an issue which was discussed in detail, resolved and agreed on Good Friday 1998. The UUP have, however, refused to act on this agreement and have repeatedly sought to renegotiate the Agreement and to tie this element of it, in a manner beyond the terms of the agreement, to the issue of decommissioning.

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The shadow institutions should have been in place last July, immediately following the election of the First and Deputy First Ministers.

In the past year this issue has been renegotiated 4 times - at Hillsborough, twice in Downing Street and most recently in Castle Buildings. Each time Sinn Fein has moved to create space for the UUP, each time our initiatives have been rejected and abused. The UUP have held to their position of "no guns, no government" which is outside the terms of the Agreement.

The reality, both in terms of democratic principles and under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, is that the only requirement for Executive office is sufficient electoral support.

A further renegotiation of this issue to meet UUP demands is totally unacceptable. Given the uncertainty surrounding the conduct of the review, the Ard Chomhairle declined, at this time, to make a firm decision on whether or not Sinn Fein would participate in the review being conducted by Senator Mitchell.

Engaging the UUP

While Sinn Fein's approach to the review has yet to be decided, the Ard Chomhairle did decide to engage in a substantive round of discussion with the UUP over the coming weeks. We are seeking a range of meetings with the UUP, at various level, both formal and informal, in a concerted attempt to find a way forward. It is, in our view, critical that there is a greater understanding of each other's positions so that every possibility of salvaging the Good Friday Agreement is fully explored. The UUP are blocking the implementation of the Agreement and it is obviously essential that the motivation for this position is fully explored.

In order to facilitate these discussions we are prepared to conduct these meetings in private and away from the glare of publicity which, at times, adversely affects the conduct of the discussion themselves.

We have been in contact with the UUP and intend to commence this

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engagement in the immediate period ahead.

Decommissioning

Decommissioning was addressed comprehensively in the negotiations leading up to Good Friday and is addressed directly in the Agreement itself. The section on decommissioning makes clear that addressing this issue is dependant on two key elements;

- a collective responsibility on all participants to work in good faith with the International Commission; and
- the implementation of the overall agreement.

There is no singular responsibility on Sinn Fein or any one party to bring about decommissioning. It is collective responsibility on all participants and one which Sinn Fein fully accepts and has acted on. We acknowledge the obligation to work in good faith to bring decommissioning about.

Unfortunately the UUP do not.

The reality is that for almost 16 months we have been attempting to address this issue in the context of the non-implementation of the Agreement and with the UUP refusing to work in good faith to create more favourable political conditions. On the contrary, the UUP have been mis-using this issue both to block the establishment of the inclusive political institutions agreed on Good Friday and also in pursuit of their objective of excluding republicans from government.

The decommissioning section of the Good Friday Agreement is free standing.

Entitlement to Executive office is dependant only on electoral support and taking and honouring the pledge of office.

Any attempt to exclude Sinn Fein on the basis of a failure to achieve decommissioning is beyond the terms of the Agreement and would be totally unacceptable.

Conclusion

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The harsh and unpalatable reality that we are facing almost 16 months after the Good Friday Agreement was concluded, is that it has not ben implemented, its potential has not been realised and the change which it promised has not materialised. At a time when those, including the Sinn Féin leadership, have been arguing that politics can and will deliver change, change has been prevented. At a time when we needed an effective, visible and dynamic alternative to conflict we have been presented with a political vacuum, the abdication of political leadership and the initiative handed to those, on all sides, who want to return to the failures of the past.

No-one should underestimate the depth or seriousness of the crisis we are facing.

If the Good Friday Agreement is to be salvaged, if the peace process is to make progress the British tactical approach has to change. The instinctive unionism within the British military and political system has to be confronted.

The Good Friday Agreement was signed up to by the British government. It is British government policy. The British government have a responsibility to implement the Agreement as negotiated, not in a manner demanded by the UUP, which is outside the terms of the Agreement.

- There has been no movement on demilitarisation;
- There is no acceptable policing service;
- No human rights agenda;
- We do not have equality.

All of these are issues of basic rights. They are also key elements of the Agreement. The UUP need to understand that they cannot prevent necessary and long over-due change in these areas.

It would be preferable if the UUP, and unionism generally embraced the spirit and the letter of the Agreement. But the Good Friday Agreement was voted for by a majority of the electorate in the two

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states on this island. It cannot be subjected to a minority unionist veto. It has to be implemented. That is the democratic imperative

If it is to be objective, genuine and within the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, the review which will take place in September, under the chairmanship of Senator George Mitchell, must address the failure to establish the political institutions as agreed on Good Friday last year. This is the area of fundamental breakdown. It must examine the causes of the breakdown, including a close examination of the role played by he British government, and it must ultimately identify the source of the breakdown and how, within the terms of the Good Friday Agreement it should be overcome.

While Sinn Féin is justifiably critical of the British government we have acknowledged and commended the positive way that Mr Blair approached the peace process. At the first meeting between this government and the Sinn Féin leadership I said to Mr Blair that the question of Ireland would be the single biggest challenge facing him throughout his term or terms in office.

Republicans understand the historic nature and the monumental shifts which are required if the peace process is to succeed, It cannot succeed without Tony Blair. He holds the key.

This process still remains the best chance for peace. If it is to succeed all participants must refocus so that the Agreement is implemented. Only the British government can create the conditions which will bring this about.

The Good Friday Agreement provides the only way forward. It cannot be renegotiated at the behest of unionism. For Sinn Fein it the absolute bottomline.

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