

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Meeting with President Ahtisaari, Paris, 10 May 2000

1. President Ahtisaari was accompanied by his personal assistant and a researcher, both from his Helsinki office. Stephen Leach, NIO represented the British side. Martin Mansergh, Ken O'Leary and Gary Ansbro attended on the Irish side.

1. Mansergh opened the meeting with a brief exposé on the issue of arms in Irish history. Arms had never been surrendered after campaigns. The current difficulty in relation to decommissioning had to be viewed in this light. Thirty years of recent violence had ended in stalemate with victory for neither the British army nor the IRA. All sides now wished to make progress through the political process but progress was bedevilled by the issue of disarmament. George Mitchell's review had resulted in the establishment of the Institutions but only temporarily. The urgent task now was to get a settlement enabling the Institutions to be revived before May 22 this year. Otherwise the No camp would consider the Agreement dead.

2. The confidence building measure outlined in the recent IRA statement, whose purpose is to confirm that their weapons remain secure, was crucial to breaking the log-jam. It was a unique concession on the part of the IRA. It had huge symbolic importance in terms of generating confidence in the IRA's commitment to lasting peace. Officials had met with Sinn Féin on Tuesday and it was clear that the modalities of inspection had still to be worked out. They were anxious to talk to Ahtisaari. They would not respond to artificial deadlines or to pressure for "clear-cut" detail. They need to feel that they remain in control of the process.

3 Ahtisaari opened by saying that "reading between the lines" (of briefing he had already received) he was to be of help to both parties i.e Sinn Féin and the Unionists. Martin McGuinness had already telephoned and made it plain that the inspectors would not be working for the IICD. Ahtisaari wanted to be absolutely clear that Blair was of the same point of view.

4. Ahtisaari asked by what means the inspectors could engender confidence in the public. On what details would they report and what guarantees would there be that arms would remain secure between inspections.? Would they be given statistical information on the volume of arms inspected and its relationship to the total? Would they have assistance in their task ? What was to be the relationship with the IICD? Would the inspectors report directly to the Governments? How was their activity to be made credible to the media?

5. Both the Irish and British sides indicated that the fact of undertaking the mission was, at this juncture, of paramount importance in engendering confidence. The detail would have to be worked out with Sinn Féin. The Irish side said that it was important that other parties should not be seen to set the agenda. Neither would it be wise to rush into finalising detail next week given the impending UUC meeting.

6. The IICD could, of course, be consulted. However, the inspectors' sole function in relation to the IICD was to report to it. The IICD would, in turn, report to the Governments. Leach explained that, for legal reasons relating to immunity, the

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Inspectors would be classed (privately) as agents of the Commission. This would amount to a legal technicality with no operational significance.

7. Both the British and Irish sides stressed that it would be important not to discuss detail with the media given the sensitivity of the issue particularly next week. Both sides undertook to draft a brief statement which might be issued by the Inspectors on Monday next when they visit Belfast.

8. There was some discussion on the issue of a private meeting between the Inspectors and Sinn Féin prior to the Inspectors' visit to Belfast. Ahtisaari said he was flexible and could make it to London (from Istanbul), by Saturday if necessary. He would prefer to meet Sinn Féin in the company of Ramaphosa. However, he needed firm and similar advice from both Governments on the issue. (Both sides agreed shortly after the meeting on the usefulness of a prior meeting with Sinn Féin and this was conveyed to Ahtisaari's aides). Ahtisaari also agreed that modalities should be worked out directly with Sinn Féin.

9. Meetings with both Sinn Féin and with the UUP are pencilled into the draft programme for Monday's visit to Belfast. (See draft programme attached).

10. In relation to possible dates for inspections, Ahtisaari would be in Scotland from 6-9 June and October would suit him well (following knee operations this Summer) for a second inspection.

11. At the end of the meeting Ahtisaari asked how long the inspectors' role would be expected to last. Mansergh explained that a very sensitive process was about to be initiated and that the speed of the process would be dictated by "what the market can bear".

Gary Ansbro
Anglo-Irish Division
11 May 2000

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