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## Meeting with Gerry Kelly

## Sinn Féin Assembly Member

## 23 January 2000

I met with Gerry Kelly in West Belfast to review the current situation. The meeting lasted about one hour. The following issues arose

- **Decommissioning.** There is no way the leadership of the Republican movement can deliver any product. The IRA cannot decommission without the approval of an Army Convention and there is absolutely no way that a Convention would, in present circumstances, give the necessary approval. People who are demanding Decommissioning should realise that it is not within the gift of the Republican leadership to deliver no matter how hard they tried. He said that even a token gesture was completely out of the question.

- Kelly accepted that there were many within the Nationalist community in the North who would like to see decommissioning happening, especially SDLP supporters. However, the guns remain silent and IRA discipline has held. Kelly said that he himself was surprised at how well the movement had stayed intact. He was derisory in his comments on the dissidents, describing them as the "coka cola IRA".

- **General de Chastelain**. Kelly discussed the recent Sinn Féin meeting

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with General de Chastelain at which Kelly and Gerry Adams represented Sinn Féin. Kelly said that he was in no doubt but that the General wanted to issue a positive report. To make that positive report, de Chastelain said, he needed "product or a commitment to deliver product".

- Kelly indicated that the area where some progress might be made was in relation to a general intention to decommission, without timetables or pressure. He was sure that the IRA wanted the peace process to work and was also sure that de Chastelain accepted the IRA bone fides on this matter.

- He said that de Chastelain feels that he was bounced last time and said that he would not be "orchestrated" on this occasion. While the General did not want his report to precipitate a crisis, he was very conscious of his legal responsibilities and was determined to remain within the Commission's remit. He would, however, exploit any wriggle room available to him to produce a positive report.

- **Unionist intentions.** Kelly said that it was highly unlikely that Trimble would be satisfied by de Chastelain's report. He will then be in a very difficult position. It is Kelly's view that Trimble will not let his resignation offer be activated, since he could not be reelected, but will seek to put the Executive into suspension while allowing the Assembly to continue. Kelly said that in such circumstances there should be no question of suspending the North-South Institutions. Unless all the Strand One Institutions go, then the Strand Two bodies should continue.

- According to Kelly the two Governments should put pressure on Trimble

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to show leadership in his party and persuade them to get off the decommissioning hook. While Trimble is valuable to the process, care should be maintained that the whole peace process is not put in jeopardy by trying to protect Trimble.

- I pointed out that public opinion in the South and many Nationalists in the North simply would not understand the Republicans' refusal to decommission. Kelly partly agreed and said that he had received some negative reaction from SDLP supporters while canvassing in Toomebridge, County Antrim for a local Government by-election. Kelly believes that such reactions will be short lived and attitudes would be reversed once David Trimble turns the row into a Unionist v Republican dispute.

- **Relations with Mandelson**. Kelly said that he has reasonably good relations with the Secretary of State who occasionally phones him on specific issues. Mandelson recently phoned Kelly on the Patten Report and complained that Sinn Féin had not endorsed Patten. Kelly said the call became somewhat heated when Mandelson went on to complain about Sinn Féin's "provocative" commemoration rally for Tom Williams. Mandelson clearly had no idea how important "Republican martyrs" are to the people of West Belfast. However, Mandelson quickly recovered his composure and they ended the call on good terms.

Ray Bassett
Anglo-Irish Division
27 January 2000

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