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Press Briefing by An Taoiseach
and Mr. David Trimble, First Minister,
Thursday 10th February 2000
Government Buildings

An Taoiseach: Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to say a few words to thank Mr. Trimble, First Minister and his colleagues for coming to meet me today and I much appreciate that. We have been keeping very much in touch over the last number of weeks, but it is always useful to have an opportunity to have direct discussions. So, I appreciate him coming today. As always, our discussions, this morning have been useful and friendly. We are continuing to do our utmost, working together to find resolutions to all kinds of current issues and issues into the future and we will continue to do so. For my part and the Irish Government's part what we have been doing over the last few weeks, which you are well familiar with, is to try to find resolutions to short term difficulties, that we can continue on to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, in all of its respects and with all of the difficulties and obstacles, that have been put in the way in one form or another and following our meeting this morning, I am determined to continue on to do that. I am conscious of time, but, regardless, we must work on and if we can find resolutions now, great. If not, we just have to keep at it and we will keep on working together.

David Trimble: Thank you very much. The main reason for my visit here is today, has been to keep in touch with developments here, to make sure that we fully understand each other, in the present situation. I think it is extremely important that we maintain the closest contact that we can, particularly over the next few days and weeks. We have been maintaining that contact over the last week or two and I thought it was useful at the present time to come, to exchange views. We have had a very useful discussion and I must say, I very much appreciate the work that the Taoiseach and the Irish Government have done over the course of the last couple of weeks, to see if we can make real progress on it. No one can predict exactly how things will develop over the next few days. We know the problems, we will continue to work at the problems. But, I do have to emphasise that they are just problems and that

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people would be wrong to regard this as being a terminal crisis in the agreement. It is not that. No matter what difficulties we might have, no matter what might flow from my own Council meeting on Saturday, nobody should regard that as being the ending of this process, it is not. We are both very clearly committed to seeing the full, final implementation of this agreement. We are disappointed that it has not worked out more positively than we had hoped. Certainly, when we in the Ulster Unionist Party, jumped first at the end of November, we thought by now, we would be in a completely different context and we are very disappointed that that is not the case, but, we are focused on trying to make sure that the hopes that are contained within the agreement and the hopes of the people of Northern Ireland, indeed, the people of the Republic of Ireland as well, that they are realised and we are committed to that.

Interviewer: Could I ask you if you have heard anything from the Taoiseach this morning, that makes you feel that your colleagues in your party might not put your resignation into force, or that indeed that the suspension of the institutions can be delayed.

David Trimble: Well, as the Taoiseach has said, there are efforts continuing and we must obviously hope that those efforts will produce a positive result. But, I do not think that there is anything that I can comment on at the moment and I do not think, it would be appropriate to do so.

Stephen: The Taoiseach this morning said that a unilateral suspension of the Institutions, would be outside the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. Is that your view?

David Trimble: Well, Stephen, I think we shouldn't be getting into those minutia or those technicalities at this stage. We are all of us, working very hard, to go through this difficulty as smoothly as possible. It would not be surprising if there are some bumps along the way, in terms of dealing with the situation. But, let us focus on the main thing, which is that of ensuring that we do see the full implementation of the Agreement, we hope that that will come about as soon as possible. It is still possible, that things could develop positively, so that there is quite a different aspect to things on Saturday morning. It might not be a terribly great hope, in view of the time available. But, it is still possible and I would be delighted, were it to happen. If that doesn't happen and we have a difficulty on Saturday, well then, we will work through that as well, whatever the technicalities may be.

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Fergal (Reporter): Question.

David Trimble: If we end up in a review, we end up in a review. We will deal with that too. I think the basic reality of this Fergal, is that we jumped, others didn't jump and that consequently we have got a problem. What we don't want to see, as a result of that is a smash. We do not want to see a crash taking place in the process. We will manage the difficulties and I am quite confident in our ability, ourselves, the other parties in Northern Ireland, the Irish Government, the British Government, that we have the capability of working through the difficulties.

Una: Can I ask you what exactly you meant in the House this morning, when you talked about the suspension of the Institutions, that the advice you are taking from the Attorney General as to the legality of that?

An Taoiseach: Well, the question has been raised in the last few days, whether we will require to rush legislation through, as has been necessary in the House of Commons and our view is that is not the case. We have to await developments and we have to wait to see. We are not at this stage, thinking of suspensions or reviews. We are trying to finish the process we are involved in. What might come later is another issue, but, at this stage we will stay firmly focused on what we are trying to achieve. I cannot be confident, but, as long as I am trying then, that is what I have to keep at.

Reporter: Your comments in the House this morning would indicate a difference of opinion between yourself and the British PM .

An Taoiseach: No, what the British Prime Minister and myself and the First Minister, and I think everybody else, wants to see us trying to find a resolution to this. If we don't find a resolution now, then we have to think of the next thing and we have to take advice at that stage, including legal advice and look at legislation and all of those things and that is the proper thing to do. But, at this stage, following my meeting this morning, I am just going to keep up, and keep on trying till the last hour.

Reporter: It has been said that you are suggesting that you and and Seamus Mallon can stay on as First Minister and Deputy First Minister even in the event of a suspension. Is that feasible?

David Trimble: Well, that is not the legislation that is going through Westminster at the moment. If a suspension arises, at the weekend, then, so far

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as the United Kingdom is concerned, that suspension would be based on the legislation that is going through Westminster at the moment. It does not provide the option that you mentioned. In fact, it is quite clear, that it will take all the existing Ministers, temporarily out of office. Let us not get into those technicalities at the moment. What we have got to focus on, is whether there is any prospect of progress and then if there is not, how we manage the difficulties, short-term, but still keep our attention on the ultimate objective to which we are still committed.

Reporter: Taoiseach, Brian Lenihan on the television last night, said that he believed there was a possibility that there would be another de Chastelain report. Today is that possibility any firmer?

An Taoiseach: Well, I suppose everything is possible, whether it is probable, I do not know, but, we are here still trying.

ENDS.

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