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ANGLO-IRISH INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE

Joint Record of meeting held on 17 June 1988 in Stormont Castle

Present

British side

Mr. King
Mr. Stanley
Sir John Blelloch
Sir K. Bloomfield
Mr. Burns
Mr. Stephens
Ambassador Fenn

Irish side

Mr. Collins
Mr. Burke
Mr. Mathews
Mr. Gallagher
Mr. Brosnan
Mr. Corcoran
Mr. O'Donovan

Secretariat

Mr. Miles
Mr. Masefield
Miss Steele

Mr. O hUiginn
Mr. Ryan
Mr. Collins

1. The Conference began with a meeting confined to Ministers. Following this, there was a restricted meeting for which Ministers were joined by the Commissioner of the Garda Siochana, the Chief Constable of the RUC and a number of officials. This latter meeting is recorded separately. The Conference then met in full session, the Commissioner and the Chief Constable having withdrawn at the end of the restricted session.
2. The Irish side raised the issue of an initiative on tackling the social and economic problems of disadvantaged areas in Belfast. In particular, they stressed the necessity for an early announcement following the discussion on the issue at the Conference in London in March and at subsequent Conferences. The British side explained their analysis of the issue and their determination to make an announcement in Parliament at an early date.
3. There was a discussion on progress in relation to fair employment legislation following the issue of a White Paper by the British Government on 25 May 1988. The Irish side said that, while there was a considerable measure of agreement, there were some important issues which remained of concern to them. These included in particular:

- The issue of goals and timetables.

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- The precise manner of the withholding of Government contracts to firms which did not comply with the provisions of the legislation.

The British side explained that they were now moving to the stage of preparing legislation. They reaffirmed their commitment to effective legislation and agreed to maintain close contact with the Irish side on the issue.

4. There was an exchange of views on the operation of the International Fund, noting, in particular, recent criticism of it. The Irish side pointed out that the Fund was now coming to the end of the first phase of its activity and that the Board had planned a special meeting to review its priorities in September. They felt that the present programmes were too thinly spread and that there was a need to concentrate on disadvantaged areas such as the Shankill, South Armagh and West Belfast. Their view was that the bulk of the money should be spent on such a programme for disadvantaged areas. They also felt that there should be one or two imaginative cross border projects which could be easily identified by the public as constituting significant action carried out by the International Fund for Ireland. The British side suggested that a discussion at Ministerial level on the Fund, as a whole, would be helpful. It was agreed that a paper would be prepared for the next meeting, with a view to having a discussion on the general policy pursued by the International Fund.

5. The Irish side raised the issue of new proposals in the field of education and, in particular, the position of the Irish language in these proposals. The Irish side suggested that Irish be made a modern language option within the proposed foundation subjects or that a separate foundation subject of Irish studies, which would include the Irish language, be created. They also raised the possibility of repealing the provision in the Local Government Act of 1949 which prohibited street signs in languages other than English. They pointed out that Sinn Fein were exploiting this issue for propaganda purposes. The British side gave examples of a number of actions being taken to support Irish language and Irish culture. They pointed out that they were willing to respect and promote all sensible suggestions to encourage traditional culture and use of the Irish language. They felt that, at this stage, the removal of

the prohibition on street signs in languages other than English could be divisive politically but acknowledged that it remained on the agenda.

6. The Irish side asked about the current position in relation to Eamhain Macha/Navan Fort. The British side pointed out that permission for quarrying at the site had been refused, although the owner continued to crush stone there. They felt that the owner was maintaining a plant at the site in the hope of obtaining higher compensation. It was hoped that he would, eventually, move to a new site some miles away for which planning permission had been given.

7. The Irish side expressed concern about the Stalker/Sampson issue and the desirability of getting it dealt with speedily. They pointed out that it had caused great concern and anxiety and affected relations between North and South. The British side set out the present position and said that they shared the desire to have the disciplinary proceedings resolved as speedily as possible. The Irish side also raised reports of a possible delay in relation to the inquest on the three people killed in Gibraltar. They stressed the necessity to deal with this issue quickly. The British side set out the current position and said that they were anxious that there should be no delay. This was, however, a matter for the Coroner.

8. The Irish side raised the issue of the forthcoming marching season. They paid tribute to the RUC handling of the marching season last year and, while acknowledging that decisions in this area were operational matters for the Chief Constable, pointed out, nevertheless, that there were a number of potential flashpoints which could have political consequences and of which it was necessary to be aware in advance.

9. The British side outlined the background to the recent move of Special Category prisoners from compounds to the H-block and stated that the life sentence prisoners and the Secretary of State's Pleasure cases amongst these prisoners would be the subject of a special review. The Irish side asked that a review of the other Secretary of State Pleasure cases still under consideration should be announced as soon as possible.

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10. There was an exchange of views on the current situation in relation to the McGimpsey case.

11. It was agreed, on a provisional basis, that the next meeting of the Conference would take place on 27 July.

Secretariat

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