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FROM: D J R HILL
Talks Secretariat
3 July 1991

cc PS/PMG (L&B)
PS/MofS (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
Mr Pilling
Mr Thomas
Mr Alston
Mr Wood (L&B)
Mr Cooke
Mr McNeill
Mr Dodds
Mr D A Hill
Mr Archer, RID FCO
HM Chancery, Dublin
Mr Brooker

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B)

9/10
in the [unclear] 7/2

TALKS: STATEMENT, 3 JULY

I attach a list of bull points which the Secretary of State might aim to get across in response to questions after this afternoon's statement.

2. I also attach a not very polished collection of suggested supplementary lines to take on points which may be raised. It may be desirable to rely, as far as possible, on the terms of the draft statement.

D J R Hill

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Talks Secretariat

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TALKS: STATEMENT, 3 JULY

BULL POINTS

1. Regret that the process did not make more progress in the time available but a firm foundation has been laid for further progress in the future.
2. Very encouraged by the time and substance of many of the substantive exchanges.
3. Process has confirmed my view that there is sufficient common ground between the parties to bring a comprehensive political accommodation within reach.
4. Hope to pick up the threads in due course.
5. Continue to believe that the best hope of resolving the political problems of Northern Ireland lies in addressing simultaneously all three main relationships mentioned in my statement of 26 March, which will necessarily involve the Irish Government.
6. [The Talks have reaffirmed that] the Northern Ireland parties all wish to discuss matters which can only be resolved in talks which involve the Irish Government.
7. Not in the business of apportioning blame for the delay in reaching plenary sessions of Strand One. I suspect that only the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland would be in a position to cast the first stone.
8. Widespread support for the process in Northern Ireland, elsewhere in these islands and overseas.
9. Genuine commitment and perseverance shown by the party delegates.
10. Resilience in the face of terrorist attacks and determination not to be diverted from dialogue.
11. Government has no blueprint or hidden agenda.

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SUPPLEMENTARY BRIEFING

1. Why did the process break down?

It became increasingly clear, as we approached the date of the IGC on 16 July - which, as I have said previously, was a commitment negotiated by the two Governments back in April - that there was insufficient time remaining to launch the other strands of discussion and complete the talks process as a whole. This constrained delegates' ability to engage in substantive discussion. It therefore seemed to me in consultation with the party leaders that it was sensible to bring the talks to a conclusion.

2. Why an IGC on 16 July?

It was agreed between the two Governments, earlier this year, that in order to enable the Talks to take place, the Conference would not meet between two pre-specified dates. Those dates were subsequently specified as 26 April and 16 July leaving a clear 10 weeks for the Talks. The two Governments' commitment to hold a Conference on 16 July has been in the public domain since the last Conference on 26 April. The Conference on 16 July is therefore very much a part of the agreed framework for the Talks which was settled before the 10-week period began.

3. Why not postpone the IGC on 16 July?

As far as HMG is concerned we entered into a commitment with the Irish Government to hold a meeting on that date; that decision was announced after the last IGC on 26 April, and all the participants understood that it marked the end of the agreed gap, during which the Talks would take place. The 16 July meeting was therefore part of the framework which was agreed for the Talks, back in April, and the Government is under an obligation to honour it as such.

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4. Did the Secretary of State ask the Irish Government to postpone the IGC?

Like HMG, the Irish Government regarded this as a commitment which was entered into in good faith and which should be fulfilled between the two Governments. I did not therefore approach them about a possible postponement.

5. Would the Secretary of State have accepted if the Irish Government had offered a postponement?

The issue would have been for collective decision by all participants to the Talks.

6. Wasn't 10 weeks always going to be too short?

The length of the interval was a compromise between various factors but the 26 March statement was agreed to in the knowledge that it would be approximately this long.

7. Did the Prime Minister and Taoiseach discuss a postponement?

No.

8. Why were the bilaterals so protracted?

It was always envisaged that the Talks would begin with bilateral exchanges to settle procedural matters, but these raised important issues of principle for the participants and it became inevitable that they would take time to resolve.

9. Still committed to 3 strands?

The analysis which underpinned the 26 March statement remains valid. It has in fact become clear over the past weeks of discussions that all the parties involved do wish to address issues arising from each of the 3 sets of relationships mentioned in the 26 March statement.

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10. Better to concentrate on talks within Northern Ireland?

That would exclude from consideration issues which all parties wish to address.

11. Can we expect movement on NI Select Committee/changes to NI legislative procedures [which got general support in the Talks]?

The Government will give careful consideration to the various proposals in this area, conscious of the need not to pre-empt the possibility of agreement on the transfer of legislative and other responsibilities to Northern Ireland representatives, and the desirability of ensuring that any proposals which were implemented had the support of representatives of both parts of the community.

12. Weren't the Government wrong to delay the proceedings by insisting on sorting out the venue for Strand 2?

I was anxious that before all the parties embarked on the full discussions we should have an agreed understanding of the steps that lay ahead. The fact that it did prove so difficult to settle this issue demonstrated the correctness of the decision to tackle it at an early stage.

13. Weren't HMG to blame for the delays over the independent Chairman?

The facts are that, for various reasons, different participants to the Talks were not prepared to sit under my chairmanship, or that of the Irish Government, or a combination of the two. Since it was obvious that someone would have to chair the Strand 2 discussions, the only other alternative was to turn an independent outsider. That was not, however, an issue of this Government's making.

14. Why did the two Governments not impose a Chairman?

The Government did not believe that any person would want to undertake the appointment if he or she could not expect the support and co-operation of all participants.

15. Wasn't it a scandal that Lord Carrington was rejected?

The two Governments regarded him as a very good candidate but he was not acceptable to others.

16. Weren't the SDLP to blame for delaying the process by walking out?

That must be a matter for the SDLP. I am not in the business of attributing blame.

17. Weren't the Irish to blame for interfering/delaying?

I am not in the business of attributing blame (or answering for the way in which other Governments conduct their business).

18. Are HMG/the Irish Government prepared to contemplate an open-ended gap to allow new talks to take place?

The circumstances surrounding any fresh talks would be a matter for discussion with the interested parties.

19. What is the Irish Government's reaction?

(Not a matter for me?) (Like HMG they are pleased that some progress has been made in the Talks; they are disappointed that the process has come to a conclusion but also remain hopeful that a basis for fresh discussions can be found).

20. What common ground was established?

As Honourable Members may be aware from reports in the press, all the four parties, as well as the Government, presented

position papers to the Conference. These led to substantive discussions about the different backgrounds, attitudes and perspectives which were relevant to relationships within Northern Ireland. I have no hesitation in saying that, although exchanges were at times robust, there were also moments when the participants received encouragement from others' contributions. That was a very positive development. I would not regard it as appropriate to go into the details of what was said, not least because I regard it as important to leave the field clear for these matters to be picked up again in the future. But I am sure that all participants to the Talks will agree that they found good things to take away from some of the discussions.

21. Did the parties agree on anything?

It will be easy for those who are cynical about the process to say that nothing has actually come out of the last 10 weeks. That would be far from the truth, however. The Talks have been immensely valuable in demonstrating that the parties have both the desire and the ability to work together to discuss common issues of relevance to them. The fact that they were able to agree to attend the first round table talks in 16 years is testimony to their ability to do business together and, in the course of the last 9 weeks, they have also hammered out a number of sensitive procedural issues in the course of negotiations and embarked on a significant and constructive exchange of views. Those are positive, tangible developments and, although a comparatively modest beginning, I hope they will provide a useful basis for the future.

New Talks

22. Will it be a resumption or new talks?

The discussions that have been taking place over the past 9 weeks took place in a framework specially devised for that purpose. It follows that, if fresh talks are to take place, a

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new deal will have to be struck with all the interested parties. [I would imagine, however, that the arrangements that have been in place in recent weeks will provide a valuable starting point for any new talks.]

23. What will happen to Sir Ninian Stephen?

The two Governments are in communication with him and have explained to him what has happened. [He has said that he is prepared to continue to make himself available, if that is what the participants would wish. Clearly, however, any arrangements that were made for fresh talks would be a matter for discussion with those involved.]

24. Weren't Sinn Fein right that the talks would eventually disintegrate under their own steam?

I am not in the business of passing judgments on the views expressed by that particular organisation, but nobody has tried to disguise the fact that this process was never going to be straightforward. As I say, my own aspiration is that we should find a basis for fresh talks.

25. Isn't it a gift to terrorism that the talks have broken down?

It will clearly be a disappointment to all law abiding people, both within and outside Northern Ireland. But the key point to bear in mind is that the determination of the British Government and of the people of Northern Ireland to resist the activities of the terrorists is as strong now as it ever has been.

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