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27 MAY 1997

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FROM: MRS DOREEN BROWN
CENT SEC

DATE: 23 MAY 1997

M Radecliffe
R Harbison
A Lytle
Mr Simpson

cc PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Watkins
Mrs Devlin

R J. Johnston

DJ
29/5

NI PERMANENT SECRETARIES

EAST/WEST ISSUES

1. On 15 May, I circulated a copy of the Taoiseach's statement of 8 May regarding increased co-operation between London and Dublin, and drew attention to a meeting of the Cabinet Office Committee on Anglo-Irish Relations which was to be held on Tuesday 20 May.
2. I am grateful to those Departments who provided material on Food Safety and on Education issues, and which IPL, who attended the meeting, used as briefing.
3. The record of the AI Committee meeting is attached for your information. I also attach a copy of the latest text of the joint statement which the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach are expected to issue today, together with IPL's Q&A brief.
4. We will be notified when the AI Committee is due to meet again, and will alert Departments to the contents of the next agenda as soon as we receive them. In the meantime, Departments may well be able to keep in touch with developments through contact with their Whitehall counterparts.



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AM (97) 1st Meeting

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CABINET

OFFICIAL COMMITTEE ON ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS

MINUTES of a MEETING held in
Conference Room E, Cabinet Office
on TUESDAY 20 MAY 1997 at 10.30am

PRESENT

Mr C R Budd
Cabinet Office
(in the Chair)

Miss L Parker
Department of the Environment

Mr D Lamont
Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Ms Diana Fymonds
Home Office

Mr C Dee
Department of Education
and Employment

Ms A Woodward
Department of Trade and Industry

Mr D Lees
Ministry of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Food

Mr K Ashman
Department of National Heritage

Mr D Brooker
Northern Ireland Office

SECRETARIAT

Mr N C Sanderson

SUBJECT

DRAFT JOINT STATEMENT OF INTENT IN COOPERATION
BETWEEN THE IRISH AND BRITISH GOVERNMENTS

NB - double sided

1. cc
Mr Thomas
Mr Stephens
Mr Watkins
Mr Gordon
AD 11.0

2. Mrs Seal
37A East/West

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THE COMMITTEE had before them a draft joint statement of intent of cooperation between the Irish and British Governments, which it was hoped might be released in the margins of the European Council meeting on 23 May. The text before the Committee was an amended version of a draft produced by the Irish side.

Opening the meeting, THE CHAIRMAN referred to the letter of 9 May from the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, copied to Private Secretaries to all members of the Cabinet, following the meeting the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister on 8 May. This letter emphasised the Prime Minister's welcome for the strengthening of bilateral links between Government Departments in the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom and asked Departments to look for opportunities for improving cooperation, and for establishing early meetings between respective Ministers. THE CHAIRMAN noted that the Prime Minister had shown the high priority which he attached to Northern Irish affairs by making an early visit to the Province and holding bilateral meetings with the main political leaders. East/West relations were an important strand in the Government's commitment to seeking a political settlement in Northern Ireland, and should be given an appropriate priority within Government Departments. He noted that not all Departments invited were represented on the Committee and suggested that the Cabinet Office should contact those Departments to ensure that they had an effective coordination point for Anglo-Irish issues.

THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE pointed out that Irish attitudes were a key factor in progress towards peace in Northern Ireland. The Irish Government considered the strengthening of bilateral contacts as important in contributing to peace in Northern Ireland. It was in the United Kingdom's interest to treat their approach accordingly.

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THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT said that a meeting of officials of the two countries had been held the previous day to discuss information technology and education. They were concerned, however, that achieving an effective degree of cooperation could require additional resources and impose additional demands on policy units. THE HOME OFFICE said that there would be a Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting under the third pillar of the European Union the following week, and offered to consider whether the statement might say rather more on home and justice issues. THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD said that there were natural areas of cooperation with the Irish in food and agricultural matters, and particularly on food safety matters, on which a meeting was taking place at official level that week. But there were also areas of policy in which the respective national interests conflicted.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE said that although Ireland was the only country with which the United Kingdom shared a land border, bilateral contacts were not as full as they were with some other states. The result was that the natural affinity of interests was not always translated into effective support from the Irish at international level, for example in European Union discussions. Irish economic weight was increasing, with a rate of growth of GDP substantially above that of the United Kingdom. There was potentially considerable benefit to the United Kingdom in improving relations with the Irish and Departments should be looking for ways to exploit this interest, rather than simply responding to an Irish agenda. Serious contacts between Ministers of the two countries would be valuable, and it would be helpful if opportunities were found to re-establish official and Ministerial contacts after the Irish election on 6 June.

No Department raised objections to the text of the statement before the Committee.

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Summing up the discussion, THE CHAIRMAN:

- noted that there was agreement on the text of the statement and that the two Governments would need to coordinate handling, both as to timing of publication of the statement and as to background briefing;
- noted that a number of Departments were not represented at the meeting, and invited the Secretariat to ensure that there were effective liaison points within Departments on Anglo-Irish matters;
- invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Northern Ireland Office to consider whether their Secretaries of State could use their contacts within Government to emphasise the importance of this initiative;
- noted that there were potential financial implications in bilateral cooperation as well as benefits, and invited Departments to flag these up as necessary when reporting back on progress;
- proposed that a further meeting to report progress should be held at the end of the summer.

The Committee -

Took note, with approval, of the Chairman's summing up of their discussion and invited Departments to proceed accordingly.

Cabinet Office
21 May 1997

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JOINT STATEMENT OF INTENT ON CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE IRISH AND BRITISH GOVERNMENTS

At their meeting in London on 8 May 1997, the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister agreed to intensify co-operation between the two governments.

The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach noted that there was already a substantial degree of co-operation in many fields, including policies aimed at tackling long-term unemployment, consumer affairs, health and medical issues, education, culture, the environment, the fight against drugs and crime, civil law matters, processing of social security payments and measures to combat fraud, youth and school exchanges, and transport links.

They agreed that co-operation in the above areas should be maintained, and that the two governments should in particular consider options for co-operation in the following areas:

1. the search for ways of benefit from the potential of new information and communication technologies in education, having regard to progress towards the Information Superhighway and proposals in the United Kingdom for a new National Grid for Learning and University for Industry;
2. the enhancement of the skill and added-value potential of the workforces;
3. having regard to the Common Travel Area in these islands, detailed co-operation in the fight against organised crime;
4. measures to deal with the issue of homelessness, with particular reference to those Irish people in Britain affected by it;
5. ensuring the highest possible food safety standards in these islands;
6. strengthened co-operation in environmental issues.

Meetings at official level have already taken place on a number of the issues identified and further such meetings are envisaged. The primary responsibilities for taking forward co-

operation lies with the Ministers, Departments and Agencies most directly affected. Meetings at Ministerial level will be arranged when they can productively take place.

The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister welcomed the initiative of Encounter in organising, with Leargas and the Youth Exchange Centre, a Youth Conference in Dublin from 6-8 June. They hoped that this conference would contribute to an enhancement in co-operation in the youth sector between both countries.

UK/IRISH RELATIONS: JOINT STATEMENT

Significance of this Initiative?

The two governments want to build on the close co-operation that already exists between them on a wide range of issues of mutual interest. Good co-operation is important in itself; the more it can be developed the better. The maintenance and development of healthy co-operation between the two Governments on social, economic and other issues could also be beneficial in building a climate of trust, which will assist our efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland.

Are these all Irish ideas?

Ideas come from both sides. Some proposals reflect ideas in the Labour Party Manifesto. We have put forward ideas on drugs/crime, social security and youth exchanges, for example.

What is Encounter?

Non-governmental organisation, set up by both Governments in 1985 to develop co-operation in the social and economic fields, independently of Government. Youth Exchange Centre (part of British Council) is playing an important part in a conference of youth workers and young people being held in Dublin from 6-9 June. Hope for effective follow-up and enhancement in co-operation between our two countries in the youth sector.

What exactly will happen in the six areas identified in the paper?

Too early to say precisely. Exploring options. We have a lot in common on food safety issues, and both recognise the need to enhance co-operation against organised crime. Meetings between officials on food safety and Information Technology in Education were held in London this week.

No mention of co-operation against terrorism?

There is already close co-operation between the two Governments on matters relating to terrorism. That co-operation will continue. This statement is concerned with other areas where there is scope for developing co-operation to the mutual benefit of both sides.

What about Northern Ireland?

This statement focuses primarily on developing co-operation between Government Departments in London and Dublin, although in a number of instances it could have implications for Northern Ireland as well. Where that is the case, the relevant Northern Ireland Departments will become involved.

(There is, of course, already very close co-operation between Northern Ireland Departments and Government Departments in the Republic on a wide range of issues and those will continue. If situations arise, however, where it would be sensible for Northern Ireland to participate in initiatives essentially intended to improve co-operation between London and Dublin Departments, then that will be done.)