

Brian Cowan TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Iveagh House
Dublin 2

The Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP
Secretary of State
Northern Ireland Office
Castle Buildings
Belfast

December 2003

Dear

Thank you for your letter in which you seek the SDLP's views on the forthcoming review.

As you know, the SDLP has been eager to coordinate our position in the review with other pro-Agreement parties, and has had a number of useful bilaterals to this end. We want to arrange a further meeting of all the leaders of the pro-Agreement parties in the first week of January. In advance of this, we wish to reserve our position on the details of the agenda for the review. We will, however, revert to you without delay on this matter in early January.

In the interim, we would make the following points regarding the review:

Nature of the Review

As the Agreement itself states, the purpose of the review is to "*review and report on its operation.*" It is not a renegotiation of the Agreement and the SDLP wishes to be clear from the outset that we will not renegotiate the Agreement. We also seek a commitment from the two Governments that that is their position also.

Chairing

The Good Friday Agreement is clear that the "two Governments and the parties will convene a conference". Accordingly, it is appropriate for the

two Governments to chair the review. We do not believe that it would be appropriate to bring in an international figure to chair the discussions.

Duration

The SDLP agrees with the two Governments that the review should be "short, sharp and focussed" and trusts that the Governments will adhere to this position. We believe that the review should be no more than three months in duration.

Frequency of meetings

The SDLP believes that the Review should be intensive, and suggests meetings three times a week.

Agenda

As indicated above, we wish to reserve our position on this matter for the time being, save to emphasise that the SDLP is fundamentally opposed to any renegotiation of the Agreement. We will revert on this matter without delay.

Sincerely,

MARK DURKAN MLA
SDLP LEADER