



JD table Update 7 April 2004.d SUMMARY LINES TO TAKE.doc

Thanks.

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22/04/2004 13:01

To: biigc

cc: Rosalie Flanagan/OFMDFM/DFP@DFP, Gail
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Subject: PREVIOUS EMAIL REFERS BIIGC

I am sending this again as when I tried to print it it cut off the edges. This copy should be ok.

Liz

Joint Communiqué

British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference

Millbank, London, 21 April 2004

A meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference was held at Millbank, London, on 21 April 2004.

The British Government was represented by the Joint Chair, the Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who was accompanied by the Rt. Hon. John Spellar MP, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office and Ian Pearson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office. The Irish Government was represented by the Joint Chair, Brian Cowen T.D., Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was accompanied by Tom Kitt T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs.

General Political Matters

The Conference reviewed political developments, including the recent publication of the report of the Independent Monitoring

Commission and the responses of the two Governments to its conclusions and recommendations. The Conference emphasised that the political process cannot flourish while the threat of paramilitarism persists and that stable politics in Northern Ireland requires the completion of the transition to exclusively peaceful and democratic means. It called on all groups to end paramilitary and criminal activity.

The Conference stressed the importance of engagement between all parties and looked forward to continuing dialogue beginning next Tuesday.

The Governments remain fully committed to the full implementation of the Agreement, the early restoration of devolved government on an inclusive basis in Northern Ireland and the full operation of all of the political institutions of the Agreement.

Review of Joint Declaration Commitments

The Conference reviewed the commitments made in the Joint Declaration, which are not conditional on acts by others. As agreed at the Conference meeting of July 2003, the Governments are committed to taking forward these commitments, particularly those in the areas of rights, equality, community and identity.

The Conference noted the ongoing progress in the implementation of these wide-ranging commitments. It particularly welcomed the following recent developments:

- The appointment of two independent reviewers, Neil Faris and Eithne McLaughlin, to conduct the **Review of Section 75** of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - dealing with the statutory duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity - and the first meeting of an Advisory Group on 20 April. The Conference also looked forward to the British Government shortly bringing forward the fifth designation order to include other public bodies within its scope;
- The preparation of a consultation paper on the **Single Equality Bill** and the preliminary discussion with political parties and key stakeholders that has recently begun. It is envisaged that the full public consultation process (Green Paper) will begin in late June;
- The completion of the consultation process on the new legislation on **Racist and Sectarian Offences**. The British Government plans - subject to the parliamentary timetable - to make the necessary legislation by the end of July;
- The recent announcement by the Secretary of State that the **Irish Language Film and TV Production Fund** will come on stream by July 2004 and the continuing progress being made in resolving the various technical, legal and financial issues involved in creating a viable platform, in the Autumn, for the increased **reception of TG4**

in Northern Ireland;

- The British Government's plan to bring forward a new draft **Community Relations** policy and strategic framework by June for focused discussion with elected representatives and key stakeholders;
- The consultation process on the proposed way forward for the new **Targeting Social Need Programme**, as announced by the Secretary of State on 14 April. In addition, arising from the Task Force on Long-Term Unemployment, targeted initiatives in West Belfast, Greater Shankill, Derry and Strabane have now been established.

The Conference will continue to monitor and advance the implementation of the commitments contained in the Joint Declaration.

The Cory Reports

The Irish Government urged the British Government to establish as soon as possible a public inquiry into the Pat Finucane case as recommended by Justice Cory.

The British Government made clear that it stood by the Weston Park commitment. It was establishing public inquiries in respect of the Hamill, Wright and Nelson cases; in the Finucane case, it would set out the way ahead at the conclusion of prosecutions.

The Irish Government confirmed that the preparations were underway for the establishment of a public inquiry into the murders of police officers Breen and Buchanan.

Human Rights

The Conference discussed human rights issues and the ongoing difficulties affecting the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. Both Governments agreed that the Commission is a key institution of the Agreement, which requires the support of the entire community for it to operate to its full potential. It is also vital that the Commission remains fully independent and is appropriately supported and resourced.

The Secretary of State briefed the Conference on his plans for achieving a strong, independent and self-confident Commission and indicated his intention to make an early announcement on the matter. This will involve a process of recruitment for a full set of Commissioners.

The Conference also discussed the establishment of a forum on the Bill of Rights, as envisaged in the Joint Declaration, and agreed that such an initiative could be helpful in developing a consensus among the political parties and wider civil society for this important project.

Security and Criminal Justice Issues

In the context of the publication of the report of the Independent Monitoring Commission, the Conference reviewed the current security situation, including the activities of paramilitary organisations and some recent incidents of concern.

Both Governments welcomed the peaceful start to the marching season and commended all those involved in seeking to defuse tensions arising from contentious parades.

The Conference took stock of current progress on enhancing cross-border justice and security co-operation, including in regard to North/South police exchanges and the pending Intergovernmental Agreement on co-operation on justice issues. It discussed the Justice (NI) Bill, its current progress through Parliament and the importance to confidence in the administration of justice of the continued implementation of the recommendations of the Criminal Justice Review.

The Conference also discussed matters relating to the use of ammonium nitrate in fertilisers and its potential use by terrorists.

North/South and East/West Matters

The Conference discussed a number of North/South issues. The Governments reaffirmed their commitment to overseeing the work of the all-island bodies and continuing the mandated work programme of the North/South Ministerial Council on a care and maintenance basis, during the period of suspension. The ongoing work of the British-Irish Council was acknowledged.

Citizenship Issues

In the context of the publication of the Joint Interpretative Declaration, both Governments discussed the proposed amendment to Article 9 of the Irish Constitution relating to citizenship and its application to Northern Ireland.

Other Issues

The Conference considered sports funding in Northern Ireland. The Irish Government raised the concerns of some sporting organisations in Northern Ireland relating to the structure and process of sports funding. The Conference also discussed the restrictions that currently apply to Irish citizens holding certain positions in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Date of Next Meeting

The Conference agreed to meet again in the coming months.

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