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24 July 1992

RESPONSE TO OPENING PRESENTATIONS

Note by Her Majesty's Government

1. The British Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the opening presentations. This response can be brief. Talks participants have a substantial agenda ahead in Strand 2. And we have just completed a full and constructive set of exchanges on the opening presentations.

2. In its own opening presentation the British Government emphasised three general points.

3. First, we stressed that, while the British Government has obligations and responsibilities which are relevant to the Strand 2 discussions, we have no blueprint. A wide range of possible outcomes would be acceptable to us, but only provided they were acceptable to the Talks participants taken together. That will continue to be a guiding principle for the British delegation as we move further into the Strand 2 agenda.

4. Secondly, we raised constitutional issues. We did so because it is inescapable that such issues have implications for relations within the island of Ireland, the central subject matter of Strand 2. The British Government will seek as a product of the Talks process as a whole an unambiguously expressed consensus on the constitutional issues and a framework for relationships which would be genuinely acceptable to all. The British Government's opening presentation offered a preliminary view on the possible ingredients of such a consensus. We shall be ready to develop this when we reach the appropriate point on the agenda. We also welcomed the Taoiseach's public assurance, and the subsequent confirmation by the Irish delegation, that, in so far as the constitutional issues are considered to have implications for Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish

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Constitution, they are among the constitutional matters which the Irish Government envisages will be "on the conference table" during the Talks.

5. Thirdly, the British Government emphasised the intrinsic importance of relationships within the island of Ireland. We recognised a need to look at the scope for giving greater breadth and depth to such relationships, and to consider possible institutional arrangements. We also noted the relevance for this part of our discussions of the framework of the European Community.

6. The British delegation greatly welcomes the way in which Talks participants have been able to explore these and other themes in the questions and exchanges on the opening presentations. We have had much useful clarification of the constitutional issues. We all now have a better understanding of the approaches of each of the other delegations to these issues. We have discussed how good and harmonious relationships within the island of Ireland are to be sustained and promoted, and the scope for developing practical co-operation where this would be fruitful. We have touched on how Strand 2 might affect common interests in relation to law enforcement, security co-operation and the objective which we all share of defeating terrorism. And we have begun, in various ways, to look forward to how Strand 2 might contribute towards an overall outcome from the Talks which gave expression to the identities of both main parts of the Northern Ireland community and would attract the widest possible degree of allegiance and support.

7. The British Government has been encouraged and impressed by the way in which the delegations have approached the opening sessions of Strand 2. Points have been argued with commitment and tenacity. But there has also been a readiness to listen to and absorb the views of others. The British Government is also most grateful to Sir Ninian Stephen for the way in which he has chaired these sessions.

8. The British Government looks forward to the remainder of the Strand 2 agenda. We have matters of great substance ahead of

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us. A number of delegations have already signalled that they will have papers to table, or further views to develop, at appropriate points on the agenda. For our part, the British Government team will be ready to facilitate the further work of Strand 2 in whatever ways seem helpful, and to offer discussion and position papers at appropriate points.

9. An approach which has already served us well is to see how much common ground we can establish on underlying realities, themes and principles before moving on to consider proposed institutional structures. Our agenda would enable us to follow this course in Strand 2, moving from the identification of respective positions on fundamental aspects of the problem, through the identification of common interests to the generation of common principles and possible institutional arrangements. The British Government looks forward to constructive engagement in that process.

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