

Progressing Beyond Strand 1

In keeping with the Secretary of State's statement to the House of Commons on 26 March 1991* setting out the terms and conditions for the Inter-Party Talks of 1991 and accepted as the basis for the current round of Talks, the SDLP wishes to propose that on the basis of the following points that the stage has now been reached for the other strands to be launched:

1. Extensive and detailed discussions at Strand I have resulted in all four parties agreeing:

(a) a common set of themes which summarise key aspects of the problems which have to be fully addressed and resolved;

(b) a common set of principles that should underlie any new agreement which would include provision for new political institutions for Northern Ireland;

(c) in principle, that new political institutions should include an elected Assembly for Northern Ireland;

(d) in principle, that such an Assembly should be elected on a PR basis and should consist of 85 members, five to be elected for each of the 17 Northern Irish parliamentary constituencies;

(e) in principle, that such an Assembly should have considerable scrutiny powers and include a committee structure;

(f) that the nature of other Assembly powers with respect to legislation and to the budget for the Northern Ireland Departments of Government which would come under the scrutiny of the Assembly, remain to be fully determined;

(g) that Executive powers and functions with respect to Government Departments, still to be fully determined, would be remitted to locally elected public representatives.

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2. As yet there exists disagreement as to the manner in which Executive powers and functions would be exercised, as well as to the composition of the body, or bodies which would exercise those powers and functions; on this matter three different proposals have been discussed: Assembly based Executive Committees; an Executive appointed by the Secretary of State from Assembly members; a directly elected Executive Commission which would include 3 nominated Commissioners, one each by the British and Irish governments, one by the European Commission, to be assisted by 6 Ministers of State to be drawn from a Northern Ireland Assembly.

3. A resolution to the problems which at present are inhibiting agreement with respect to the composition and powers of an Executive is, in the view of the SDLP, dependent on matters which other parties claim are pertinent to Strands 2 and 3 discussions when the Irish government will be a participant in the Talks.

4. Given the degree of understanding and agreement which has now been reached and, without prejudice to the ultimate position of any party to the Talks, the SDLP believes that the stage has now been reached when it is both appropriate and necessary for the Secretary of State to announce the launch of the other Strands.

* "It has been agreed by all the participants that before long, when, after consultation, I judge that an appropriate point has been reached, I will propose formally that the other two strands should be launched. My judgement as to timing will be governed by the fact that all involved have agreed that the sets of discussions will be under way within weeks of each other".

Extract from the statement by Mr Brooke MP to the House of Commons, 26 March 1991.