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ANNEX B

6 July 1992

STRAND 2: EXTRACT FROM OPENING STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF STATE

Both the Strand 2 agenda and the possible agenda for Strand 3 provide for discussion of constitutional issues. The contributions by the UK Government team to the meetings in London on 19 June, at which Irish Officials were present and on 30 June when Mr David Andrews, TD the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs was co-chairman with myself, both made reference to these issues.

We are concerned in Strand 2 with relationships within the island of Ireland. It is inescapable that constitutional issues have implications for these relationships - as they do for other topics which fall to be addressed in the Talks as a whole.

None of us can be in any doubt as to the strength and depth of the different views which are held on constitutional issues. Among other views represented around this table are those who are content with the present reality that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and those who have an aspiration to see a United Ireland. As my predecessor put it in a speech on 9th November 1990: "it is possible to take either position with integrity. It is acceptable to uphold the one or advocate the other by all legitimate peaceful and democratic means. What is not acceptable, and what totally lacks integrity, is the promotion of either view by the crude and brutal methods of violence and coercion."

If, despite these different viewpoints and aspirations, we could all reach clear agreement on the present constitutional realities

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and the circumstances in which they might change then the talks process is more likely to achieve a successful outcome commanding widespread support.

Her Majesty's Government believes that such agreement, taking account of the different viewpoints, is not in principle unattainable, however difficult it may be to achieve in practice. My predecessor's statement of 26 March 1991 made clear that it would be open to each of the participants in the Talks to raise any aspects of the relevant relationships including constitutional issues. The British Government, for its part, 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 will be genuinely acceptable to all.

We believe that such an outcome should thereby enable all participants to acknowledge Northern Ireland's present status as a part of the UK, and to recognise that there will be no change in that status without the consent of a majority of the people who live there, that the present wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland is for no change but that if, in the future, a majority of the people of Northern Ireland clearly wish for and formally consent to the establishment of a united Ireland, both Governments will introduce and support legislation to give effect to that wish.

Insofar as this is considered to have implications for Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution I have already welcomed the Taoiseach's public assurance that they are among the constitutional matters which the Irish Government envisages would be "on the conference table" during the Talks.

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