An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Report of Government Meeting with Sinn Féin

18 December 1995 at Iveagh House
(First round of preparatory talks within framework of twin-track process)

Government Side: Tánaiste, Minister for Justice, Minister for Social Welfare, Secretary Dalton, Secretary O hUiginn, Paul Hickey (D/Justice) and the undersigned.

Sinn Féin Side: Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, Rita O'Hare, Pat Doherty and Lucilita Bhreathnach.

1. The Tánaiste welcomed the opportunity afforded by the meeting for the Government to hear Sinn Féin's views on the format for all-party talks. The Government is determined to intensively work the Joint Communique. This morning it made its submission to the International Body. In the political track, today's meeting would be followed by a bilateral with the SDLP tomorrow (Tuesday) and one with the Alliance on Wednesday (which might also include both Governments meeting the party in the margins of the IGC).

2. Adams said Sinn Féin has written to the Taoiseach giving their assessment of the quality of the twin-track process. (The Tánaiste said he had not seen the letter referred to and therefore could not comment on it). Their written submission to the Body was also copied to the Government yesterday. Sinn Féin will probably publish it in the New Year. They had asked to see a copy of the Government's submission and are renewing this request. The Tánaiste responded that there had been a collective decision by the Government that the submission would be confidential, but that he would feed the revived request to see it back into the system.

3. Adams said that the same urgency and sense of decisiveness which the members of the Body had brought to their task should be brought by both Governments to the political track. They would like to see the Irish and British Governments speedily move the process into multilateral talks. The process should ideally be compressed into intensive "Dayton-type" talks, otherwise it would drag on.

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4. On the structure of such talks, Adams said that while they would prefer talks on the basis of two strands (i.e. North/South and East/West) they could live with three strands, once it was clear that this was within the context that an internal settlement was not acceptable, and on the basis that both Government would be involved in all strands. In response to the Tánaiste's reaction that this would pose a problem for Unionists. Adams said "we'll live" with the three stranded basis (i.e. for 1991/92 talks, with no Irish Government role in Strand 1). The Tánaiste said it would be made clear to everyone that in all party talks we were not just talking about an internal settlement.

5. On the format for the talks the Tánaiste said that after an initial round of bilaterals, they would hope to move quickly into joint meetings and multilaterals if they can get them. Trimble had rejected our request for a meeting. There are indications that he may be open to renewing contact in the New Year.

6. Adams and O'Hare said it is important that the two Governments reassert that they are in the driving seat. They have the ability to call all party talks and should do so. The same message will be conveyed to Secretary of State Mayhew at Sinn Féin's meeting with him tomorrow (Tuesday). The Tánaiste said the Government is doing all it can to move the process forward.

7. Adams said that a range of confidence issues including Irish language rights, a Bill of Rights, and equal employment need to be dealt with. These are equality of treatment issues which the British Government signed up to as far back as Stormont and reaffirmed in declarations and agreements since then. These measures do not require negotiation and should have been dealt with decades ago. Sinn Féin participation on (Delors Fund) Partnership Boards has only been agreed to reluctantly because funds must be disbursed on the basis of equality of treatment. The Tánaiste said the task of engendering the confidence and trust of nationalists, is an agenda which is driven by the Irish Government. These issues will be on the agenda for Wednesday's meeting of the IGC.

8. The Tánaiste asked for a sense of Sinn Féin's views or issues relating to the format for

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talks, some of which are housekeeping matters. These would include the size of delegations, who should chair the talks, would they agree that talks would be confidential, where would the talks take place, the basis for keeping parties informed of progress in Strand 3 and the plan for referendums North and South to ratify the outcome of negotiations. Also is there any formulation for an election which Sinn Féin could accept as Trimble will run hard with his proposal.

9. Adams agreed to come back with a more considered response, but provided some initial views. A convention or assembly is out. The SDLP and Sinn Féin are both opposed to this. Sinn Féin are aware of suggestions for elections based on a list system. They don't understand what exactly is proposed here but they have some people looking at it. Sinn Féin object to Unionist refusal to recognise their mandate arguing that they fought the last three elections based on a peace strategy. Adams hinted that Sinn Féin might not contest an election for an assembly and said that the party would in any event have to convene an extraordinary ard fheis to ratify attendance at any Assembly. Minister de Rossa conceded that the UUP proposal has not been well thought through, but they need a way of accessing all-party talks which would include Sinn Féin. If they came to talks they could hopefully bring some of the DUP with them. Sinn Féin should see the proposals in the light. Secretary O hUiginn explained the basis behind Mark Durkan's recent "indexation" proposals.

10. On the housekeeping issues, Sinn Féin would not see the size of delegations as a problem issue. They feel both Governments should chair the talks. They don't want another Sir Ninian Stephens (McGuinness said that the British were hoping to 'ghost write' his report of the 1991/92 talks). Belfast is the obvious venue for talks but they would like Dublin used also.They would refuse blanket confidentiality but would consider agreeing to it in specific instances.

11. On ratification of the outcome of negotiations, Adams questioned the need for referendums in saying that Sinn Féin is of the view that the means of measuring agreement would form part of the discussion for agreement. If British jurisdiction remains, referendums in the North and South mean nothing unless people want something less. The vote in the North would override the result. It is down to the issue of sovereignty. At the moment that issue lies

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with the British Parliament.

12. The Tánaiste said that this position would make matters more complicated. If the message went out that Sinn Féin was not interested in referendums North and South to ratify an agreement this would be seen as another barrier and create serious doubts about their position. There would be no point in putting proposals in a referendum unless there was cross-community support. Minister Owen added that we would need Sinn Fein's agreement in principle that both Governments could put proposals to the electorate if the Governments felt that sufficient agreement - having cross-community support - had been achieved to merit seeking ratification.

13. Doherty sought to raise a list of prisons issues, including releases and transfers from abroad. Secretary Dalton suggested a direct meeting with D/Justice to discuss these issues.

14. At the close of the meeting the Ministers raised so-called punishment beatings. Sinn Féin responded that their opposition to such beatings has been made very clear on many occasions. They sought to play down the reported level of beatings arguing that some instances involved drunken brawls. The reality on the ground is that there is no acceptable police force and measures taken to stamp out anti-social behaviour are popular in local communities The Government side stressed that these practices should end and that people should not take the law into their own hands.

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Anglo-Irish Division
19 December 1995

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