



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Press Conference by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Tom King,  
following the Special Meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference  
Stormont, 2 February 1988

Mr. King: We've just completed a special meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference held at the request of the Irish Government and a request to which we very readily acceded. I was accompanied by John Stanley, Minister of State. The Irish team were led by Mr. Collins in the absence of Mr. Lenihan who is, unfortunately, not able to be here, and he was accompanied by Mr. Burke. We had a very full discussion indeed. Irish Ministers made very clear the great strength of feeling and concern they had over recent issues. They put forward a number of views and proposals in relation to the matters that we discussed for consideration by the British Government and I gave an initial response on some of the matters that fall within my responsibilities and it was agreed that we would meet again very shortly. I would like to say that I think it was a very valuable meeting. We were discussing very serious issues indeed and I think that against that background it did show very clearly the value of the Anglo-Irish process in that it provided such a speedy opportunity of a forum for Ministerial discussion on issues that are of great concern and which both sides take very seriously indeed. And as I say, we are due to meet again very shortly for further discussion on these matters.

Q: Have you taken any substantive decision about whether you'll let the Irish Ministers know the contents of the Sampson/Stalker report or the Inspector of the Constabulary's report or tell them what you are doing on the disciplinary proceedings?

Mr. King: I don't think it would be helpful at this stage to go into the particular points. I said the Irish Government put forward a number of views and proposals. I responded initially to some of those. Some of those are for further consideration and we are due to meet again shortly and I'm not prepared to go further than that today.

Q: Do you think that the Anglo-Irish process is devalued if the Irish Government can't get the British Government to do something about its requests?

Mr. King: The first request that the Irish Government made was for the earliest possible meeting. We've just had that today. It's been, by any standards, a very full meeting. I think some five hours of discussion have taken place. They've taken place in a very serious and responsible manner. Working with Ministers Mr. Burke was standing in for Mr. Lenihan, but Mr. Collins who we have had the opportunity of working with now over a number of months. Here we are, as Governments, faced with a very serious issue, a very difficult issue, which we are very concerned to approach in a responsible way and I think it's true to say that both Governments are absolutely committed to the fight against terrorism, to the importance of cooperation between our countries and both very concerned to see that other events don't damage those prospects and the success of those other achievements.

Q: What have the Irish side asked you to do?

Mr. King: I'm not prepared to go into the detail of the matters that they raised. As I said in my opening statement we will be having a further meeting very shortly.

Q: Did you say to them that some disciplinary charges may be taken against some police officers after the Stalker report?

Mr. King: It's a brave attempt to invite me to go into some of the details but as I said I listened to a number of the points that they made. I made certain initial responses to a number of the matters. I also discussed and we covered very fully some of the background and detail of the various events in this matter and the various procedures that are involved and of course some of those are covered within my statement to the House of Commons earlier and those matters which I commented on initially but in the detail of those I would rather not go any further at this stage.

Q: Do you believe, Mr. King, that your action or the Attorney General's action or inaction against those within the Security services, where there was evidence of perverting the course of justice, do you think that your action has in any way damaged the image of the RUC in Northern Ireland?

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Mr. King: I think the first point which is very clear from a lot of the commentators on this, is that very often people haven't got their facts right and, with respect, that question is wrong. The decision that was taken and the decision which is the main subject of the meeting we had today, was actually the decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland.

Q: Well, with respect, allowing for what the DPP said, which is ultimately articulated by the Attorney General, do you think the outcome of his articulation has in any way damaged the image of the RUC and has in any way undermined their position as the force trying to win the support of the Catholic Nationalist Community?

Mr. King: I said in the House of Commons that the reputation of the RUC stands on its achievements and performance of the time. That the RUC of today, the RUC the people recognise, the RUC that has earned, I believe, an enhanced reputation with the people of both communities within the province. I always think it's important in this matter to recognise that the problems that we are addressing are the consequences of things that happened in 1982 and it's very important in looking at the issues of confidence in the administration of justice, confidence in the relationship of the security forces and the community to recognise the situation as it is today and the situation and the reputation of people who serve in it now.

Q: Mr. King, even saying this, if you don't mind my observing, the Irish Government does not believe that these are events which occurred in 1982. They believe they are events which are linked by a whole series of things including the events surrounding the Stalker Report and so on to the present day and that the final link was the speech of the Attorney General and they do not see this as a matter hidden in the past, as far as I understand it.

Mr. King: I think you will understand that after a five hour meeting I am pretty well aware of the views of the Irish Government which they put very forcefully and very clearly and I don't need any reminding of them now.

Q: Is the Dublin Government's position in relation to extradition any different from what it was 48 hours or 24 hours ago?

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Mr. King: I understand it's not changed. We've made clear, or did make clear earlier, our concerns about some aspects of the Extradition Act that was passed, but we've also given our commitment to seek to help make the process work and that's what we shall undoubtedly seek to do.

Q: Were you, if you can't give it to us, in a position to give the Irish Government as much detail as they wanted on the whole affair?

Mr. King: I would rather not at this stage because we are due to meet again very shortly, go in any detail into discussions we had.

Q: How shortly sir?

Mr. King: That is not yet finally determined.

Q: Mr. King, last week the Irish Government postponed the meeting between John Hermon and Eamon Doherty. Does that postponement, is that postponement still in effect or will local and cross-border security cooperation meetings continue now as a result of the meeting today?

Mr. King: I don't think anybody can doubt that I've paid tribute in the House of Commons at the time of my statement, which was the very day of the arms find on, I think, it's Five Fingers beach in Donegal and to the increasingly effective and most welcome contribution being made by the Garda in the fight against terrorism and I don't think John Stanley and I have any doubts whatsoever of the commitment of the Irish Government as the commitment of the British Government to the fight against terrorism. We both recognise the curse that it is across the whole of the island of Ireland and indeed into more widely into the United Kingdom, and we share that determination to do everything we can to tackle it.

Q: Well, will they meet?

Mr. King: I certainly hope so, yes.

Q: Secretary of State who controlled the Special Branch in 1982 and who controls the Special Branch in 1988?

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Mr. King: I think matters of detail at this stage, although I understand you are seeking to take me down that track, I'd rather not respond on either

Q: Secretary of State, did your meeting with Sir John Hermon this morning have anything to do with today's Conference meeting?

Mr. King: I made clear that one of the things that I have to do is to respond to the House of Commons, I promised the House of Commons a further statement on the report that is being conducted by Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary. That report, a copy has gone to the Chief Constable and I am looking for his very early comments on that so that I can then consider together with the Minister what response we make on the matters that I referred to of the organisation, supervision, control of the RUC.

Q: Do you know when he'll make that response?

Mr. King: I don't yet know that finally, but I hope quite soon.

Q: Do you think that the Chief Constable should consider his position in the light of the allegations which have been levelled at him by John Stalker in the recently published articles?

Mr. King: I have no comments to make on issues at the moment. I had a discussion this morning with the Chief Constable in relation to the McLechlan Report. And if I may say so, I have every confidence in the Chief Constable in the discharge of his responsibilities and the leadership that he gives to the RUC.

Q: Secretary of State, did you make it clear today that you in fact stood over the Attorney General's statement in the Commons and his ruling on Stalker/Sampson?

Mr. King: Could you put that clearly ... did I stand over?

Q: Today did you stand over what the Attorney General said in the Commons and stand over the Attorney General's ruling and is that going to remain the situation on this problem?

Mr. King: I think it is important, because these are complicated matters, that we actually get it clear. It isn't the Attorney General's ruling, it was the Director of Public Prosecution's decision. I am sure that is quite clear and the Attorney General made that clear in his statement to the House on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Q: Surely, Secretary of State, what was the public interest would have had to be defined for the DPP by the Attorney General?

Mr. King: The statement that the Attorney General made of acquainting himself with matters that he considered were relevant under his statutory duties to consider the public interest, a duty that is laid on all Attorney Generals over history, that they have that statutory constitutional duty to do so and he acquainted himself of the facts, that he consulted those who he thought it proper to consult and that he informed the Director of those consultations. The Director then determined, decided that in the light of that information and considering the other aspects of the matter, that he did not consider, he directed there should be no prosecutions.

Q: Well were the parameters for the decision of the DPP not in fact laid down by the Attorney General?

Mr. King: The decision of the DPP.....

Q: Is there any going back on it, Mr. King?

Mr. King: I think, just to make one technical point, to make this clear, the Attorney General does actually have the power to issue a direction to the DPP but it's important to note that on this occasion he did not actually do so.

Q: Is there any going back on that decision, Mr. King?

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Mr. King: I'd rather not discuss that, the Attorney General has made his statement, he's made clear the direction that was made by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Q: Mr. King, are you confident that the Irish Ministers have returned to Dublin this afternoon accepting the Attorney General's views taking that the prosecutions were not taken because of interests of national security.

Mr. King: No, there is no secret that the occasion of today's meeting was caused by the very great concern of the Irish Government about the implications of the statement and the decisions that were announced in it. They have made no secret of that and, as I say, they came here, they left us in no doubt about the strength of their feelings about it, their concern about the implications that could flow from it and they put forward a number of views and proposals to us. I made certain initial comments on matters that were within my responsibilities but the points that they made they wished to address, not merely to me, but through me also more widely to the British Government and I took, in certain respects, to ensure that their views were known as appropriate and that we agreed that we would meet again very shortly.

Q: May I ask you, I asked you once if there was any going back on that statement. May I rephrase that and say, is it constitutionally possible, in fact, to go back on the statement that was made by the DPP?

Mr. King: The DPP didn't make the statement, the Attorney General did, the Attorney General has made his statement.

Q: Yes, can it constitutionally be gone back on?

Mr. King: The Attorney General has made his statement.

Q: You say it won't be gone back on?

Mr. King: I have said the Attorney General has made his statement.

Q: Can he make another one, Mr. King. Can he make another one that supersedes the one he .....

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Mr. King: I think you ought to actually stop and think what your question means and when you have thought what your question means, in which the Attorney General makes a statement reporting on a direction issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions of Northern Ireland, I would know of no precedent for any such reversal.

Q: Secretary of State, can I ask two questions. First of all, on the Birmingham Six appeal, was that an issue that was raised today. Secondly, what do you today have to say to the minority community of Northern Ireland who have been devastated by the sequence of events in terms of confidence in the RUC and security forces?

Mr. King: I would say this in response to the first point, that they did raise those matters in connection with the implications that they felt they had in the field of confidence in the administration of justice and that was one of the issues, as you know, which was of concern to them, although it does not, of course, fall within my direct responsibilities. On the second issue, I very well understand why you put that question. These are extremely difficult issues indeed in which people of integrity have to have regard, as they are constitutionally bound to do, to the public interests and national security and, as I think a phrase that the Attorney General used, have regard to the balance of harm. I would hope that my own efforts in respect of dealing fairly with both communities are understood and I hope, to an extent, respected in this province, that I am very conscious indeed and determined to fight for equality of treatment, of opportunity for everybody in this Province. You've heard me say that on more occasions than you can probably count. I bitterly regret that as Secretary of State since 1985, that events of 1982 and all the difficulties and wretched complications that ensued with them, should actually exist now in a way to quite clearly risk damaging the much better reputation that I believe is now deservedly enjoyed by the RUC in conduct and in the security forces in their conduct in seeking to police as fairly and impartially as they can in the face of the most acute and evil provocation that they so often face and I would just say this to the minority community: I hope they know my commitment, I hope they recognise the importance that I attach to fair treatment for everybody in this province and I hope they recognise that what is important are the issues of today and the

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performance of today and recognise that if those achievements have been made that they are the achievements that must endure and that it is in the interests of everybody in this province to ensure that we stand together against the evil terrorist influence which otherwise will only bring unemployment and misery and suffering to everybody in this province.

Q: But Mr. King, have you no understanding of what the perception of your contribution to undermining the integrity of the DPP's office and indeed, the role which has been achieved, at some level, within the nationalist community of acceptance of the RUC? Have you no perception of what that really is in the Nationalist community right now?

Mr. King: Yes.

Q: How can you ask them to believe you at this point in time?

Mr. King: Yes, I know, if you listen to the phrase I used about a balance of harm, that I have responsibility to everybody in this province. I have to have regard to the issues of the public interest in national security, these are matters that finally fall to the Attorney General and he is charged with the responsibility of deciding who he will consult and then in determining what advice and information he should give to the Director of Public Prosecutions. But I am well aware of the appalling difficulties that this whole issue, lasting over as many years as it has and the damage that it has done throughout the confidence of the communities in Northern Ireland. At the same time, as I say, one has to consider the widest interests as well.

Q: May I ask you whether you are one of the people consulted by the Attorney General and if, in fact, you were aware before the statement ....

Mr. King: Well the answer to the first question is no and so probably the second one false.

Q: No, in fact, it's a different question.

Mr. King: Right.

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Q: Were you in fact made aware of what he was going to say before it was said?

Mr. King: In the answer, so that people got it right, you said, 'am I able to ask you were you consulted', and the answer, 'no', is no you may not ask me because the Attorney General does not ever disclose who he consults in the public interests and I think you know the answer to that. In the second one, yes I was aware shortly before he made the announcement and before, of the decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions which was advised to me.

Q: Are you in a position to say whether the Prime Minister also was aware?

Mr. King: Government Ministers were informed of the decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions shortly in advance of the statement.

Q: Do you think progress is being made?

Mr. King: It was a very serious and a very difficult meeting in the sense that these are very, very grave issues and obviously do pose very real difficulties for us and I don't think it is for me to judge whether progress was made or not. We certainly took very clear note of the views and proposals that were put forward. We were left in no doubt at all of the strength of feeling and concern of the Irish Government on these matters and we have agreed to meet again very shortly.

Q: Mr. King are you saying that relations have been damaged by the events of the last few days?

Mr. King: These are very difficult issues and they obviously have raised very real problems and damage is an emotive word, but issues have been raised which we take very seriously indeed.

Q: Did you know a short time in advance of the Appeal Court rejection of the Birmingham Six appeal?

Mr. King: Not at all.

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Q: You say you gave an initial response. Did the Dublin Ministers find that response reassuring?

Mr. King: These are very difficult issues. I'd rather not go into the detail of what we discussed or the initial reactions or anything else.

Q: In your view, is some of the heat out of the situation now?

Mr. King: It is not for me to answer that.

Q: Well, you are in a position to judge.

Mr. King: I would not presume to judge that at this stage.

Q: Mr. King, is this Anglo-Irish process frozen until this issue has been resolved?

Mr. King: We've just had one meeting under the Anglo-Irish Agreement, a special meeting at the Irish Government's request, to which we readily acceded and we're likely to have another meeting very shortly, so I don't think that counts as a freeze.

Q: Were the views and proposals of the Irish Government confined to the question of the command structure of the RUC, the Clarke/Banyon report and the administration of justice or did they also extend to the whole workings of the Conference and was there an official complaint from the Irish Government at the absence of consultation before the announcement?

Mr. King: Well, we certainly do seek consultation and the whole purpose of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is to establish and maintain that and in a sense today's meeting was an illustration of that. But obviously there were aspects, and I won't go any further than that, of the consultation situation which are of concern to the Irish Government.

Q: Did you make a commitment to the Irish Ministers to bring forward their views and proposals to the British cabinet this week?

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Mr. King: I'm not going to go into any more detail on what I said ....

Q: Was it essentially a single issue agenda today, Mr. King, i.e. loss of confidence on the part of the nationalists?

Mr. King: No, that wasn't the item on the agenda. We were considering the implications or raising implications of recent events in this manner.

Q: What do you think of the accusation that the British Government has breached the Agreement, Article 7 of the Agreement by failing to consult the Irish Government?

Mr. King: I think we'll leave that under the heading of views and proposals.

Q: Mr. King, the composition of your next meeting, is it the few of you again, or Mr. Lenihan or will it extend to the Attorney General's and to the respective police chiefs?

Mr. King: I have no comment on that at this stage. But I think very possibly it will be the same.

Q: Did the Irish Government ask today, Mr. King, for sight of the Sampson/Stalker report and were you able to give them any satisfaction in that regard?

Mr. King: I think that was about question no. 2 which I said we would leave under the heading of matters on which I was not wishing to go into more detail. The last one.

Q: Just for clarification of an earlier answer. When you said that you know of no precedent for any such reversal, that was in the light of the Commons statement and what have you, are you saying in that that you mean ....

Mr. King: No it's not ... no ...

Q: ... no reversal of the no prosecutions decision?

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Mr. King: No, I said in that connection, I was talking about a direction, I mean we have to keep your mind very clear on this issue, as you know. Otherwise you'll get a rocket from me for getting it wrong, but the Attorney's statement was to inform the House of a decision, direction given by the Director of Public Prosecutions and so the question that I was asked was, could he make another statement, and I merely drew attention to the fact that it's not the statement so much as the direction if people think it through, presumably that you're talking about and I know of no precedent, but I may be uninformed, I know of no precedent for one direction to be given and then a subsequent direction to be given later