



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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**Confidential**

**Meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference  
London, 1 February 1996**

***Summary***

The meeting, which consisted of two lengthy private sessions involving Ministers only, reviewed developments since the publication of the report of the International Body. Discussion on how best to proceed in the political track was inconclusive, with the British side unwilling to endorse an Irish proposal that the Governments should convene a two-day proximity conference in the second half of this month. It was agreed that the Conference should reconvene in Dublin next Wednesday to hear the considered British response to this proposal.

A joint press statement (copy attached) was issued after the meeting. A copy of the Tánaiste's introductory remarks at his post-meeting press conference is also attached.

***Detail***

The meeting took place in the Old Admiralty Building Offices of the Northern Ireland Office. Delegations were as follows:

<i>Irish side:</i>	Tánaiste	<i>British side:</i>	Secretary of State
	Minister for Justice		Michael Ancram
	Pádraic MacKernan		John Chilcot
	Sean Ó hUiginn		David Fell
	Ted Barrington		Quentin Thomas
	Val O'Donnell		Veronica Sutherland
	David Donoghue		Peter Bell
	Fergus Finlay		Stephen Leach
	David Cooney		David Hill
	Paul Hickey		Jonathan Stephens

Sir John Wheeler also attended the lunch.

Discussion was concentrated in two sessions restricted to the Tánaiste and the Minister for Justice on the Irish side, and the Secretary of State and Michael Ancram on the British side. The Conference did not meet in plenary session. Discussion over the lunch which followed the meeting was largely social in character.

The Tánaiste and the Minister for Justice briefed accompanying officials after each session and the following summary account is based on that debriefing.

*First Session*

- Ministers had a frank exchange on the events of the previous week, largely rehearsing what had been said publicly. The Secretary of State sought to explain the impact of a number of events on the nature of the Prime Ministers statement on the report of the international Body. These included hostile reaction to the report among Tory back-benchers, Conor O'Clery's report in the *Irish Times* on the morning following the receipt of the report, and the leaking of the report to the *Irish Independent*. In regard to the latter point, the Tánaiste made clear that the leaking of the report had not served the interest of the Irish Government and voiced our suspicion that the leak had emanated from London.
- Following these initial exchanges, Ministers concurred that the way forward depended on the resolve of the two Governments to work together. They agreed that efforts should be intensified in the political track.
- Irish Ministers stressed the need to refocus on the report of the International Body and to urge parties to accept its recommendations.
- British Ministers emphasised that, in their view, the only viable way to all-party negotiations was via an electoral process. They argued that Trimble needed a mandate to talk to Sinn Féin in order to cover himself *vis à vis* his own backwoodsmen and the DUP. Irish Ministers resisted British efforts to get agreement to work on a joint approach to elections, arguing that the British Government needed to establish whether it could sell its ideas to David Trimble, before it sought to secure the agreement of nationalists. Irish Ministers pointed out that the key test for nationalists in regard to any electoral system would be whether it led automatically to negotiations within a fixed time frame. They pointed to the very bleak outlook if nationalists were to agree to participate in elections only to for them to lead to nothing.
- The Irish side pressed their proposal that the two Governments invite all the parties to a two day conference to discuss the report of the International Body and arrangements for all party negotiations, including whether and how an elected process could play a part. This meeting would be called in the second half of February with view a view to seeking consensus on arrangements which would allow the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister to announce the launching of all party negotiations at their Summit meeting. The Irish side explained that, if necessary, discussions at such a meeting could take place in a proximity format. The

Secretary of State responded cautiously and undertook to put the idea to the Prime Minister.

- The Irish side emphasised their continued commitment to the firm aim of launching all-party talks by the end of February. The British side expressed the view that it should still be possible to reach agreement by that date on how and when negotiations would be launched, but that if, as they assumed, elections were to be a necessary precursor to negotiations it would not be possible to start talks by that date.
- The Irish side pointed to the necessity for unionist engagement in the political track and urged the British side to use all the influence at their disposal to persuade David Trimble to meet the Irish Government. The British side expressed the view that Trimble may now feel that he has made a mistake in refusing to talk to Dublin.

### **Second Session**

The Tánaiste and Minister for Justice reported that the meeting had got nowhere and that it had been agreed that the Conference should be suspended and reconvene in Dublin on Wednesday. They listed the main points of the discussion as follows:

- Mayhew reported that the Prime Minister had expressed surprise at the Irish proposal which he saw as inserting an additional element - coming between the preparatory talks and the Summit - in the process agreed in the Joint Communiqué. The Prime Minister suggested that if the Governments were to announce their intention to convene a conference along the lines proposed by the Irish Government, it would damage his chances of bringing David Trimble into the process.
- Nevertheless, under pressure from the Irish side, the British side conceded that the Irish proposal could be interpreted as being fully consistent with the terms of (Paragraph 4) of the Joint Communiqué.
- The British side repeated their view that it would not be possible to launch all-party negotiations by end of February, due to the need to organise elections.
- The British side said that they needed more time to convince Trimble of their proposals for an electoral process. They were not prepared to put it to Trimble that he alone was holding up the peace process.
- The British side pressed for agreement that officials should work on agreed set of

proposals for an electoral process. The Irish side avoided any commitment on this point.

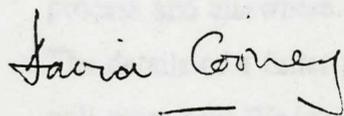
- The British side saw no inconsistency in their promotion of elections and their claim to fully accept the report of the international Body.
- The Irish side proposed that the Conference be adjourned to allow the British side time to prepare a more considered response to the Irish proposal for proximity talks. It was agreed that the Conference would resume in Dublin, next Wednesday and that, in the meantime, efforts would be made by both Governments to intensify contacts in the political track.

### *Meeting with Trimble*

During their discussions, the Tánaiste and the Secretary of State discussed their intentions as to their participation in a debate on Northern Ireland due to take place the following day at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The Secretary of State sought to highlight the opportunity for the Tánaiste to meet David Trimble who was also scheduled to attend. The Tánaiste indicated that the Davos meeting presented him with some diary problems, and that, in any case, he would prefer to meet Trimble on a formal basis. The Tánaiste expressed regret that Trimble had pulled out of a debate in Bandon which he and Trimble had been expected to address the day after the Davos meeting.

Following the break, it was established that logistical difficulties would prevent a formal meeting taking place in Davos.

After the suspension of the meeting, the Tánaiste phoned Trimble in the House of Commons to express regret that they would not be able to meet over the next few days. It was agreed that they would speak again by phone on Saturday evening, following Trimble's return from Davos, with a view to arranging an early meeting.



David Cooney

Anglo-Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs

2 February 1996

SF107/2

**DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**INTER-GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE**

**LONDON, 1 FEBRUARY 1996**

**JOINT PRESS STATEMENT**

A meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference was held in London today.

Ministers had an extensive discussion of the progress made in the peace process since the publication of the report of the International Body.

Ministers expressed their gratitude to the members of the Body for discharging their mandate with such skill and efficiency.

They discussed the report at length and the potential it offers for the way forward.

They agreed that discussions should be intensified in the political track of the twin-track process and elsewhere. A number of meetings of this kind will take place very shortly. The details of a fuller programme will be worked on over the next few days. Ministers will meet next Wednesday at a resumed session of the Conference to review this programme and to agree the way ahead.

Press Section

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PRESS STATEMENT

Today's meeting of the Conference was devoted exclusively to a review of developments in the twin-track approach to all-party negotiations announced jointly by the two Governments in the November Communique.

We considered the report of the International Body and how it could assist us in bringing all parties to the negotiating table. We had an open, honest and, I feel, constructive discussion of the obvious differences of emphasis which the two Governments have placed on particular elements of the report.

As a result of our discussion, we have decided to accelerate and intensify the preparatory talks with a view to achieving our joint aim of reaching agreement on the launch of all-party talks by end February.

These talks must address the report of the International Body; the basis, participation, structure, format and agenda of all-party negotiations; and whether and how an elected process could play a part.

To this end, we will be seeking to meet with the parties over the coming days. We have also decided that this meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference should resume in Dublin next Wednesday to allow us to continue our discussions and to decide how our commitment to the intensification of the political track can be carried forward from that point.