



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Positions on Recent Election Proposals

1. Since David Trimble's speech to the Ulster Unionist Council on 22 September, the idea of elections as a means of building confidence and of moving to all-party negotiations has gained momentum and support. This development was recognised by the two Governments in the Joint Communiqué when they said that the issue of "*whether and how an elected body could play a part*", in the context of an interlocking three-stranded process, could be examined in the preparatory talks. While recognising that the issue was outside its remit, the report of the International Body maintained that "*if it were broadly acceptable, with an appropriate mandate, within the three-stranded structure, an elective process could contribute to the building of confidence*". An examination of the parties' positions on a possible elected body follows.

British Government

2. In a paper presented at the Liaison Group meeting on 30 January, the British outlined their proposal to "*to provide an electoral basis for the participation of Northern Ireland political representatives in substantive political negotiations on all relevant relationships*". Included in the paper were the following proposals:
 - election of 90 representatives by PR (STV) on the basis of the current 5 member constituencies or on other proportional basis like a province wide list system;
 - these representatives to act as a "pool" from which party delegations for talks could be drawn;
 - while no assembly/convention/body would exist, the representatives could be convened at times to discuss issues raised in the talks;
 - negotiations to take place between small party and Government delegations. The structure of talks to be along the same lines as in 1991/92;
 - parties which fail to get electoral mandates to be involved in the talks process in some way;
 - upon agreement being reached the outcome could be put to the elected representatives to test if it was likely to command "*widespread acceptability*" within Northern Ireland, prior to the holding of referenda North and South.
3. It was not until the Prime Minister's Commons statement on 24 January that the British were prepared to publicly advocate the idea of elections. Mr Major said that if the paramilitaries would not begin decommissioning, the only other route to all-party talks was "*to secure a democratic mandate for all-party negotiations through elections specially for that purpose*". Recognising the need for nationalist concerns about this proposal to be addressed, he nevertheless stated his readiness "*to introduce legislation, and to seek both Houses' urgent approval for it, in order to allow an elective process to*

go ahead as soon as may be practicable”.

4. Publicly, the British, while focusing on the notion of an election process, have not completely ruled out the question of a body as such. Speaking in Scotland on 27 January, the Secretary of State argued that elections would provide a means whereby *“parties can ask the electorate to endorse their claims to be wholly committed to peaceful methods”*. Insisting that this was not *“a proposal for another Assembly”*, he suggested that *“from those elected could be drawn the teams that negotiate for each party”*. Sir Patrick continued to try to disassociate this concept of elections from an assembly during an interview on 29 January when stating that an *“election, not an Assembly, but an election process is what’s needed”*.

British Labour Party

5. **The Labour Party, reaffirming their bipartisan approach, backed Mr Major’s advocacy of elections. However, they have stressed the need for widespread agreement among the parties before proceeding with them and have called for an intensification of discussions in the political track in order to facilitate agreement on the best way forward.**
6. During the debate in the Commons on 24 January, Mr Blair agreed that Mr Major’s proposal for elections deserved *“serious consideration”* and signalled his intention to support any necessary legislation.
7. However, Mo Mowlam, speaking in the House of Commons on 25 January, said that Mr Major’s announcement had generated *“a worrying air of distrust and a lack of confidence”* and she urged the Government to allay nationalist fears by making clear that movement towards any body would only go ahead with the agreement of all parties.
8. Ms Mowlam is already on record as being tentatively supportive of the idea of having talks electorally mandated. Speaking on 4 December, she said that *“it may be that some sort of electoral mechanism or index would help to bring all parties into negotiations-but...it must not lead to the domination of negotiations by one community nor be seen as a precursor to or form of internal settlement”*.

U.S. Government

9. **While the Clinton administration has sought to remain neutral on the election issue, recent indications suggest that they may now see it as a viable way to make progress. While Senator Mitchell reported President Clinton’s desire to see all-party talks commence by the end of February, US spokesmen have urged that proposals for elections be given serious consideration. Mr Jim Fetig, speaking on 30 January urged *“that the proposals for elections be discussed as part of the twin-track process. We appreciate the British Government’s willingness to give weight to the finding of the international body that the paramilitary organisations will not decommission weapons prior to talks and to open another route to all-party talks”*.**

Ulster Unionist Party

10. **Despite his insistence on the need for the creation of an elected body, Mr Trimble has made little attempt to sell the plan to its nationalist opponents and has been repeatedly vague on how (and if) such a body could become a vehicle for substantive negotiations. In meetings with the British before Christmas he indicated that he did not necessarily regard the body as a vehicle for all-party talks, but rather as a mechanism for preparing the groundwork for these talks and to take evidence, either in plenary or through committees, on matters such as North/South cooperation and policing. He also suggested that when the conditions were right, "members" might indeed conduct substantive negotiations- but this would be on behalf of their parties and probably outside the context of the body itself. Whether or not he could accept the British idea of elections for the sole purpose of identifying negotiators remains unclear.**
11. In a speech to the Ulster Unionist Council on 22 September, Mr. Trimble suggested that one way in which Sinn Féin could obtain a democratic mandate and show a commitment to the democratic process would be through its participation in a new Assembly. Suggesting that the new body could be time limited and have very restricted (if any) powers, Mr Trimble argued that it could provide a forum for all the parties to discuss the future of Northern Ireland with each other at a time when certain parties have yet to prove their commitment to exclusively peaceful means and could not be involved in substantive negotiations. Thus he argued that *"an Assembly could bridge that gap until they do meet the requirements of the declaration"*.
12. Despite apparent differences between this plan and the British idea of elections to negotiations, Mr Trimble welcomed Mr Major's Commons statement and suggested that nationalist objections could be overcome if there was the necessary will. He said that the necessary legislation *"could be carried through the House very quickly and we ought to set for ourselves the target of elections in April and May of this year so that the elected body can get down to work as soon as possible, and so open the way both to decommissioning and to substantive negotiations"*.
13. While the UUP appear slightly more positive on the possibility of talks developing from the body, Mr Trimble continues to give ambiguous signals on how and when this could be done. Speaking on radio on 27 January, he stressed the need for a large ninety-member body to accommodate all shades of opinion in the North. Initially, he said, this body would be a forum for debate but that later its members would *"move through that into negotiation"*. He also admitted that *"the exact way in which we do that is not yet determined"*.
14. Speaking on 25 January, Mr Reg Empey argued that *"if the method of a strictly limited elected conference/negotiating table makes representatives of the unionist community better able to address all the issues, then surely that is also in the interests of nationalists"*. Mr Empey also maintained that the body could deal with *"the totality of relationships throughout these islands"*.
15. The UUP continues to insist that decommissioning must be addressed prior to substantive talks regardless of whether or not elections take place. Speaking on 26 January, Mr Trimble said that the issue would *"still have to be satisfied for the purpose"*

of moving into serious negotiations” and he insisted that “*it is the only way there is going to be dialogue with all the parties*”. Mr John Taylor, speaking on 28 January, said that initially “*we would...have each party in the body stating its position, but I would hope that people would quickly gain confidence in each other, there would be some decommissioning, and then negotiations*”. Mr Taylor also rejected the idea that an elected body should be discussed in the preparatory talks. Arguing that it had “*nothing to do with the Government in Dublin*”, he said that it was “*a matter between the United Kingdom Government and the parties in Northern Ireland*”.

SDLP

16. **The party reacted with anger to Mr Major’s Commons statement and remains, despite meeting with the Prime Minister on 30 January, strongly opposed to his election proposal. They continue their insistence on the need for an intensification of preparatory talks on the basis of the Mitchell report in order to facilitate the achievement of the end of February deadline for the commencement of all-party negotiations.**
17. Speaking in the House of Commons on 24 January, Mr Hume accused the Prime Minister of buying votes to “*keep itself in power*”, and asked Mr Major if he would agree “*that this commission does not recommend any form of election, that the proposal was outside its remit...if all parties commit themselves to those principles, then that would allow you to fix the date for all-party talks*”. Speaking on 28 January, Mr Mallon claimed that the election proposal was “*a smokescreen..which is trying to cover up the fact that the British Government and the Unionists have rejected the essential element in the Mitchell report and that is something of great significance*”.
18. Nationalists have traditionally been wary of unionist Assembly proposals, fearing an attempt to force an internal settlement and to abandon the three-stranded approach by effectively giving priority to one dimension of the talks. This fear was best articulated by Mr Seamus Mallon when, speaking on 9 November, he suggested that the offer of an internal election amounted effectively to unionists telling nationalists that if they accept and seek election upon the unionist concept of the constitutional framework of Northern Ireland, then “*we can perhaps do business*”. However, Mr Mallon argued that “*since the nub of the problem is that nationalists do not accept that framework as their own, and will not do so unless there is a new dispensation they can genuinely relate to, the election proposal is a means of making acceptance of an essentially unionist perspective the entry ticket for negotiations for nationalists*”.
19. Nevertheless, Mr Mark Durkan has indicated both publicly and privately that the possibility of some linkage between elections and negotiations could be explored. Speaking on 10 October he said that “*we are not opposed to the idea...that when we move into talks it might be useful to in some way get those talks electorally indexed*”. Speaking on 27 January, Mr Durkan repeating this view, maintained that “*since people are raising the issue of mandate we would obviously have to listen to a case that might emerge for the all-party talks being electorally indexed*”.

DUP

20. The DUP have long advocated the establishment of a constitutional convention for the purposes of negotiating a settlement. Despite their welcome for Mr Major's statement, they are likely to insist that the body itself be the main forum for negotiation. As the latest British proposal does not envisage the elected representatives sitting in any institutionalised capacity, their agreement to any such proposal seems questionable. Speaking on 24 January Mr Peter Robinson pledged his party's commitment to work with the British Government towards electing the body and said that he could see "*no other route....unless there is to be decommissioning prior to talks. That of course, would remove the need for the elected group*". Before his meeting with the Prime Minister on 31 January, Dr Paisley said that he would be looking for firm undertakings from Mr Major that the elections would take place "*because if he doesn't have these elections...then the people wouldn't have any faith in his promise of a referendum at the end of the day*". He also expressed concern at suggestions by the Secretary of State that elections would not necessarily lead to the creation of a body. The DUP also insist on complete IRA decommissioning as a precondition for their participation in talks with Sinn Féin and have given no indication that elections would alter this stance.
21. The DUP reacted to Mr Trimble's September speech by claiming that it was a variation of the DUP's 1993 "Breaking the Logjam". In this document it was proposed that a new Assembly would have the task of agreeing a form of government, firmly within the UK, for Northern Ireland. Any proposal which gained the support of 60% of the Assembly could be put to Parliament. The document also argued that any agreement arrived at by the Assembly and supported by Westminster must be put to the North's people. Since September the party has been very vocal in calling for the establishment of a constitutional convention along similar lines to that outlined in their 1993 document. While they accept the need to work with Sinn Féin within such a convention, they adamantly reject any attempt to equate this with negotiation and have ruled out the possibility of it being addressed as part of the twin track process. While there would be no role for the Irish Government in Strand One issues, Strands Two and Three would be handled by committees which could hold discussions with the Governments. They also propose that an independent chairman chair meetings between the committees and the Governments.

Sinn Féin

22. The party's reaction to Mr Major's Commons statement has been hostile. Like the SDLP they advocate intensification of the political track so that the end of February deadline can be achieved. While refusing to engage in serious discussion on an electoral process, they have not ruled out the possibility of participating in elections.
23. In a statement issued on 25 January, Mr Adams said that the proposal had "*nothing to do with consolidating the peace process, it has everything to do with keeping Major in power and with satisfying Unionist resistance to all party talks*". Speaking on 26 January, Mr Adams said that if unionists wanted to pursue the electoral proposal "*let them come into talks and put it where it belongs- as part of the necessary discussion,*

but not as any sort of precondition. Our opposition to that is implacable and absolute”.

24. Following his meeting with the Secretary of State on 30 January, Mr Adams called on Mr Major to retract his proposal. However, he did not rule out further discussion of the idea suggesting that *“the British Prime Minister should clearly, if he has notions of elections, put those where they belong- into the twin-track process and into all of the other political process discussions”*.
25. Addressing a rally to mark the 24th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, Mr McGuinness said that *“we are not going to give them their new Stormont. We are not going to be part of their Assembly”*. When asked in a radio interview on 28 January if Sinn Féin would participate in elections, Mr McGuinness said that in the next few weeks the *“National Executive will meet and discuss that and in due course we will make our decision”*.
26. Initially, after advancing his proposal at a speech on 22 September, Mr Trimble took some encouragement from the fact that Sinn Féin, despite being unenthusiastic, did not dismiss the idea completely out of hand. While claiming that the UUP proposal was a *“diversionary distraction”*, Mr Adams, speaking on BBC television on 1 October, said that if elections were held to any new assembly, Sinn Féin would participate in them. However in his statement of 9 October Mr Adams argued that *“seeking to promote and create a new unionist dominated Assembly, repackaging an old unionist proposition, will not build bridges of trust with nationalists”*.
27. Speaking to the *“Irish Times”* on 12 January, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin seemed to indicate a significant shift in Sinn Féin policy towards Mr Trimble’s proposal. He said that if reports of a British Government proposal to establish a 45-member elected body were accurate, then his party would *“give very serious consideration to the proposition”*. Speaking on the same day to the *“Belfast Telegraph”*, Mr McLaughlin said that while *“negotiating delegations selected by the parties would be a better idea...a proposal for a 45-member forum that would not just be another talking shop would go some way to meeting Sinn Féin’s requirement for all-party talks and would be more workable than any 90-member body”*.
28. However, the response of senior party members to Mr McLaughlin’s comments suggested that he may have been engaging in something of a solo run. Giving an emphatic dismissal of the proposal on RTE radio on 14 January, Mr Martin McGuinness said that *“many of us who have been deeply involved in this process view the prospect of an elected assembly with almost dismay”* and maintained that *“an elected Assembly in the North of whatever size, ninety or forty-five, is a non runner”*. Explaining this intense objection, he argued that a new elected body would:
 - *“be an invitation for parties who have refused to come out of their bunkers to remain there;*
 - *stiffen the resolve of those who believe that an internal settlement is possible;*
 - *detach Dublin and minimise its role in negotiations for a real and true democratic settlement;*
 - *further delay and prevent meaningful all party negotiations.”*

Alliance

29. Although keen to see negotiations commence urgently, the Alliance party have advocated elections to a negotiating forum as the only way of securing unionist participation.
30. The Alliance party have been deeply critical of nationalists for rejecting Mr Major's latest initiative. Party chairman, Mr Steve McBride, speaking on 26 January, argued that "*elections would allow us to move forward without anyone surrendering their principles or compromising their position*". Criticising Sinn Féin, he said that "*now, when the possibility exists of moving forward into talks and political dialogue through simple democratic methods of calling elections, Gerry Adams and Sinn Féin are again saying no*".
31. In a document entitled "Let the people have their say", published last November, the Alliance Party expressed grave doubts about the prospect of preparatory talks succeeding and called for the establishment of an elected body. This body would have no executive, administrative or legislative functions and its purpose and remit would be to "*seek the maximum agreement on a political settlement which addressed all the different sets of relationships already agreed and set out in the previous Inter-Party and Inter-Governmental Talks in 1991/2*". The party also proposed that the body contain the following elements:
- be elected by PR (5 members elected by STV from each Westminster constituency, 90 in all);
 - to be constituted for a fixed term of 12 or 18 months, with no more than a limited possibility of extension. If it was being used as an obstruction mechanism it could be wound up early;
 - any report or conclusion emerging from the body would require the support of at least 70% of its members and should then be put to the people by referendum;
 - committees to be set up within the body to examine and seek agreement on matters such as policing, North/South relations and the economy. Submissions could also be received from community, business, religious and other bodies;
 - to be chaired by an independent figure, be held in a venue "without associations" and to have a non-parliamentary layout for seating.
32. The document insisted that the body should be "*specifically required to address the North/South dimension, to meet and consult with relevant parties and bodies, North and South, and to include proposals on North/South issues in any report or conclusions submitted*". While such a provision would appear to suggest the possibility of some Irish Government involvement, no attempt is made to articulate what this involvement could or should be.

PUP

33. **The PUP have, as recently as their meeting with the Tánaiste on 23 October, advocated the establishment of an elected body. Despite this, reaction to Mr Major's statement has been somewhat mixed. The party, like the UDP, is deeply concerned about the consequences of their failure to secure a mandate in elections.**
34. Speaking on RTE on 29 January, Mr Billy Hutchinson said that while his party thought "*an elected assembly in Northern Ireland is a good idea*", they believed Mr Major was "*putting the cart before the horse (in that) elections should come after all party talks, not before*". Agreeing that his party needed to get an electoral mandate, he nevertheless argued that he did not believe it was a good idea at this stage and that instead "*people should be allowed to sit down round a table and discuss how we move forward*". He also wondered that in the event of no loyalists being elected who was going "*to talk about loyalist decommissioning*".
35. However, speaking after his meeting with the SDLP on 29 January, Mr David Ervine said that at the present moment he saw "*no other way, than the idea of elections*".

UDP

36. **Unlike the PUP, the UDP have been vocal in their opposition to elections and have highlighted the possible dangers associated with their failure to secure representation at all-party talks.**
37. Speaking on 27 January, Mr Gary McMichael signalled his fear that "*elections are a means of sidelining the people we represent*". He continued to suggest that "*if we have elections and they hold discussions, we may not get beyond the decommissioning issue. And if that is the case and no political agreement emerges, then the unionist parties are opening up the opportunity for the two Governments to impose their Framework Document recommendations*". He also said that members of the UDA "*feel the unionist parties are trying to get rid of them from the process*" and that "*that is taking us into a dangerous phase, and at present those elements have no incentive to subscribe to the Mitchell principles*".

Anglo-Irish Division
31 January 1996

Reaction to the Report of the International Body

Reaction to the publication of the Report of the International Body was overshadowed to a large extent by the response of the British Prime Minister in the House of Commons that afternoon. In his speech he effectively moved the focus away from examining the content of the Report to his proposal to hold elections in the absence of a start to decommissioning. This note focuses on reaction to the Report of the International Body as such.

All parties in Northern Ireland endorsed to varying degrees the six principles (committing the parties to exclusively democratic and non-violent methods) outlined in the Body's Report. The Unionist parties, not surprisingly, objected to the conclusion that decommissioning would not take place in advance of all-party negotiations.

British Government

The British Prime Minister, in his statement to the House of Commons, said that there was much in the Report which the British Government could welcome and endorse. He said that the key to progress in Northern Ireland is confidence. He further stated that the issue of arms has been the biggest factor holding back all-party talks.

Mr. Major highlighted the Body's acceptance that there is no equivalence between illegally-held arms and arms held by the security forces. He stated that the Body had concluded not that the paramilitaries could not disarm but rather would not disarm. He further asserted that if all parties accepted the 6 principles, this would constitute "a significant step forward", and even more significant would be an acceptance by all parties of the wide principles of consent outlined in the Downing Street Declaration.

The Prime Minister went on to say that while immediate decommissioning would constitute the best way forward, if this were not to happen an election would provide "a viable, alternative direct route" to building the necessary confidence. The only other choice instead of elections, according to Mr. Major, is for a start to be made to decommissioning before all-party talks.

British Labour Party

Party leader, Tony Blair M.P., welcomed the Report, describing it as "constructive and helpful". He endorsed the six principles. He stated that the simplest way of providing tangible evidence of the confidence necessary is by decommissioning. If, however, it is decided that decommissioning will not happen prior to talks, he stressed that it is incumbent on those making it so to find other means of building confidence.

U.S. Government

President Clinton described the Report as “a valuable tool” towards achieving the goal of all-party talks with recommendations which deserved “serious and open-minded consideration”.

The U.S. Ambassador to Ireland, Ms. Jean Kennedy-Smith, said that the Report proposes a “road map through the demands and preconditions to forward movement in the peace process”. She further stated that it would provide “a strong basis for continued negotiations and discussions”. She urged all parties to study the Report carefully and to “react in a way best calculated to further the peace process”.

Northern Parties

SDLP

SDLP reaction to the Report was positive. Party leader, John Hume M.P., recommended that, if necessary, all parties should discuss the Report with one another. He described it as a “major means” of breaking the political logjam. He endorsed the six principles of democracy and non-violence. He stated that the evidence of the past 18 months has made very clear that the guns have stopped being used. He said that the British Government was rejecting a core element of the Report (the conclusion that decommissioning cannot take place in advance of all-party talks) and was in this at odds with both Senator Mitchell and the Irish Government.

Reacting to the endorsement by the British Prime Minister of elections in Northern Ireland, John Hume pointed to the fact that the International Body Report did not recommend the convening of elections. He further stated that the election of a body could not become a further precondition.

Deputy leader, Séamus Mallon M.P., interviewed prior to John Major’s speech, described the six principles as “very positive and proactive” and said that they left no doubt about the required commitments to democracy and non-violence from all parties.

Sinn Féin

Sinn Féin’s response to the publication of the Report of the International Body was favourable, with Gerry Adams describing the Report as a basis for progress. He highlighted the Body’s assessment that decommissioning before talks was “an unreasonable demand”.

However, following John Major’s statement in the House of Commons, Gerry Adams accused the British Prime Minister of “acting in bad faith by swapping

one precondition to all-party talks for another". He asserted that John Major's announcement had "effectively ended the twin-track process". He accused the British Government of wasting 17 months of ceasefire and called on John Major to immediately commence all-party talks.

In a Sinn Féin statement on 25 January, Gerry Adams was quoted as saying that John Major had "rejected the Mitchell Report".

Ulster Unionist Party

While party leader, David Trimble M.P. maintained that the party was "very interested in the principles that have been stated and indeed those principles are the only recommendations made by the Report", he nevertheless said that he saw nothing in the Report that would move the parties towards a political settlement.

With regard to the enunciated principles, he said "these principles would commit them (the IRA) to an end of killings and we would be interested to see whether they're prepared to commit themselves to that and honour them".

Trimble further stated that "the suggestion being put about that the Mitchell Report recommends dropping the prior requirement of decommissioning is not in fact a recommendation". He expressed concern regarding the Report's reference to a legal amnesty in the event of decommissioning.

Security Spokesperson, Ken Maginnis M.P., stated that the Report was very positive and contained "a good deal of what we have been advocating for some considerable time". He pointed to the fact that the Report recommended a commitment to total disarmament and to democratic and peaceful means towards arriving at a settlement. He stated that the Report, taken as a package, can help to move things forward.

Democratic Unionist Party

(Note: The DUP was the only mainstream political party to refuse to meet with, or make a submission to, the International Body.)

Party leader, Rev. Ian Paisley M.P., speaking following the Report's publication, accused the International Body of "playing into the hands of Sinn Féin/IRA" by stating that immediate decommissioning is unattainable. He described the Report as a "farce, fudge and falsehood".

Deputy Leader Peter Robinson M.P. initially described the Report's conclusion that immediate decommissioning is unattainable as a "moral absurdity". In an interview he criticised the "failure of the Body to extract one bullet from terrorist organisations". Following Prime Minister Major's statement on an election in the House of Commons, however, he stated that he would support the six principles

laid down in the International Body Report but would have liked the Body to have laid down further principles.

Ulster Democratic Party

Party leader, Gary McMichael, described the Report as “a genuine attempt to deal with a very complex issue”. He welcomed the suggestion of an amnesty in the event of decommissioning which had been contained in the UDP submission to the International Body.

David Adams described the Report as “a genuine and non-partisan attempt to find a way forward”. He concurred with the proposal to deal with decommissioning during all-party talks.

Progressive Unionist Party

Billy Hutchinson said that the party would have to await the response of the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) to the Report. He pointed to the necessity to build up trust between the “two protagonists..and the CLMC is one of the protagonists”. He asserted that this could only be achieved by negotiation.

Irish Opposition Parties

Fianna Fáil

Fianna Fáil leader, Bertie Ahern T.D., said he “warmly welcomed and fully supported the unanimous Report of the International Body”. He added that “the Report provides the means for breaking the logjam over decommissioning and it should be firmly grasped”. Mr. Ahern said that the six principles put forward by the Body “involve an absolute commitment to democratic and peaceful means of resolving political issues”.

He said that the Body’s conclusion that decommissioning prior to all-party talks will not take place is “the reality with which all concerned must deal”. He added that “phased decommissioning would provide confidence-building during the talks process”.

He strongly urged the British Government “not to move the goalposts yet again and to act in good faith with the Communique of 28 November”. He regretted that “before the ink is dry, the British Prime Minister appears to have effectively rejected the Body’s Report as a means of moving directly towards all-party talks”.

Progressive Democrats

Mary Harney T.D., party leader, accepted that "like all others, I must ponder the unanimous conclusion of the Body" that prior decommissioning will not take place. Ms. Harney said she sees the way around the impasse in two parts. "Firstly, the adoption of the six principles...and the conclusion of the Body that there is a clear commitment on the part of those in possession of such arms to work constructively to achieve full and verifiable decommissioning as part of the process of all-party negotiations". Ms. Harney urged all parties to retain an open mind on the establishment of an elected body.

Further comment by the International Body

At the press conference launching the Report of the International Body, Senator George Mitchell made clear that it had concluded its work with that conference. However, members of the Body have been available for interview in the days immediately after the launch. Senator Mitchell stated on 25 January that "it was up to the parties themselves to decide whether an elected body would help or hinder the peace process". He refused to be drawn further on Prime Minister Major's election proposals.

Mr. Harri Holkeri denied, in a radio interview, that Prime Minister Major had rejected the Report of the Body and said that in his view the Prime Minister had responded "relatively positively". On the question of a possible elective process, Holkeri said that this issue was beyond the mandate of the Body and was "in the hands of the Governments and parties". General de Chastelain, also in a radio interview on 25 January denied he was disappointed that Mr. Major's response had overshadowed the Report. He added "We have established six principles which are the key to the Report, to overcome the impasse or lack of confidence and trust in bringing people to the talks with or without weapons. And our feeling was that if the six principles were agreed to by all the parties this would go a long way to doing away with some of the mistrust and could indeed lead to all-party talks".

Security Section
Anglo-Irish Division
26 January 1996