



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/107/4

Creator(s): Department of Justice

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Joint Paper "Resolving the Address to Decommissioning"

Introductory Remarks by Irish Government, Tuesday 24 June 1997

On behalf of the Irish Government, I am happy to present to you the paper we and the British Government are tabling in a determined effort to bring to a conclusion the opening address to decommissioning, and to enable us to proceed into three-stranded substantive negotiations. Such negotiations offer us a real chance to reach a durable, comprehensive and widely-acceptable settlement.

I do not propose to speak at length. Our views on the decommissioning question - like the views of all other delegations - have been aired exhaustively over many months. Moreover, the paper is, in our view, largely self-explanatory. Of course, we look forward to answering questions and to offering any necessary explanations or clarifications in the course of debate. This paper is, however, the result of intensive discussions between the two Governments. It represents a carefully considered, and in our view balanced, assessment of the best, and indeed in our view the only realistic, way forward. It is based firmly on the Report of the International Body, which we continue to believe represents the only realistic basis on which to proceed.

I am in a position to assure you that this paper fully and accurately reflects the approach not just of the current Irish Government, but of whichever Government may emerge from the first meeting of the new Dáil this Thursday.

The Irish Government is fully committed to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. It is also fully committed to the successful conclusion of these negotiations. These objectives are complementary. Certainly, it is our view, as it is that of the International Body, that it is unrealistic to expect that decommissioning will be achieved other than in the context of comprehensive negotiations.

In the paper we are tabling, the two Governments offer a formal joint undertaking that we will do all we can to ensure that the decommissioning issue is resolved to the satisfaction of the participants as an indispensable part of the negotiating process. It would be appropriate that others, too, ask themselves how they can best contribute to the achievement of the twin goals of

political agreement and decommissioning. What is clear is that the stalemate of the last year has brought neither one inch closer. We must surmount this long-standing impasse now. The people we represent will not tolerate any continuation of the impasse in which these Talks have been stuck for so long. All of us have a responsibility to make progress here.

The paper is structured in two parts. The first of these sets out the position of the two Governments. It is clear that all participants will not be involved in the achievement of decommissioning in the same way. The two Governments recognise the responsibilities we have, in particular to carry the process forward so as to build confidence among participants without blocking the negotiations. We also recognise our responsibility to act so as to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to make sure that the modalities of decommissioning, as set out by the International Body, can be implemented without delay at the appropriate time. To this end both Governments have also enacted the necessary legislation.

We also recognise the importance of the six principles of democracy and non-violence as the foundations of these negotiations, and the necessity for all participants, including any party which might join at a later date, to subscribe to those principles. We will likewise require any such party to subscribe to any commitments entered into by participants as part of the conclusion to the address to decommissioning.

The second part of the paper proposes a set of conclusions on items 2 (a) - (c) of the agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary, to which all participants are invited to subscribe. These conclusions are largely based on the propositions advanced in the first part. They set out a series of commitments to be entered into by participants, current and future. They provide for mechanisms for achieving further progress on decommissioning. The terms of reference for an Independent Commission, and for a Committee of the Plenary with two liaison sub-committees, one on decommissioning and one on confidence-building measures, are also proposed.

We remain convinced that the way ahead lies in the implementation of all aspects of the Report of the International Body, including the compromise approach to decommissioning envisaged in paragraphs 34 and 35. We urge all participants in these negotiations to commit themselves to work constructively and in good faith with us in our efforts to secure such implementation.

We have proposed mechanisms through which this objective can practicably be achieved, and which will facilitate the necessary interaction between progress in comprehensive and inclusive political negotiations and progress on decommissioning.

We join the British Government in commending these proposals to you and we urge their acceptance as a basis for resolving the address to decommissioning as envisaged in our joint communiqué of 28 February 1996.