



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.

46
25
6
PST: PSS: Messrs. Teahon,
Donlon & Dalton:
Ambassadors London &
Washington: Joint Secretary:
Counsellors A-I

616/1

Secure Fax: 616

23 June 1997

No of pages including this one: 7

To: HQ

From: Belfast

For: Second Secretary O hUiginn

From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Joint paper

1. I attach, as discussed, drafts just received from the British side in respect of (a) an introductory statement for the Secretary of State at tomorrow's Plenary (which assumes prior agreement to table the paper); and (b) a press line for use by the Secretary of State.
2. The drafts seem broadly acceptable, though certain elements (such as para 14 of the introductory statement) are tantamount to an invitation to propose amendments and need modification..

+ para 2

CONFIDENTIAL*Fax 6/6/2***GOVERNMENTS' JOINT PAPER ON DECOMMISSIONING**Introductory statement to Plenary

1. Mr Chairman, I told the plenary on 3 June that we had an opportunity to relaunch these negotiations with fresh impetus and a renewed sense of purpose and determination.
2. Our goal in these negotiations is a comprehensive, lasting political settlement which has the broad support of all parts of the community in Northern Ireland. If we are to achieve that goal within a credible timescale we must commence substantive political negotiations no later than this coming September.
3. I also made clear on 3 June that I was determined to facilitate the necessary agreement on the issue of decommissioning to the satisfaction of the participants in order to make it possible to set a firm date for the start of substantive negotiations in the three strands.
4. Dick Spring made a similar commitment.
5. This joint paper delivers on those commitments.
6. It represents an attempt by the two Governments to build on the considerable efforts which have been made in the months since last October to find a possible basis for agreement on this important, complex and sensitive subject. I know that you, Mr Chairman and your colleagues, and many of the participants, worked long and hard and with a measure of success to identify some common ground on this issue.

CONFIDENTIAL

2

CPL/1142/CAO

616/3

CONFIDENTIAL

7. In this joint paper the two Governments have sought to build on the progress already made and take account of the clearly expressed views of the various parties. We accordingly put forward for consideration a set of "possible conclusions" on the issue of decommissioning which we believe could win general support.
8. We commend these proposals to the parties. The British Government for its part, along with the Irish Government, would be happy to explain and discuss these proposals, in plenary or bilateral meetings as seems most appropriate. We hope it will be possible to move to a determination before too long.
9. The "possible conclusions" are based squarely on the report of the International Body. The two Governments see no other way in which the issue could be resolved on a generally satisfactory basis. If Sinn Fein join the negotiations we envisage a process in which there would be due progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the substantive political negotiations, generating a progressive pattern of mounting trust and confidence.
10. In practical terms, the necessary enabling legislation to facilitate decommissioning is already in place in both jurisdictions and the two Governments propose that the Independent Commission recommended by the International Body should be established alongside the launch of the three strands, with a remit to develop draft schemes for decommissioning and put itself in a position to facilitate actual decommissioning as soon as practicable.
11. We suggest the establishment of a Liaison sub-Committee of plenary to liaise with the Independent Commission and a distinct sub-

CONFIDENTIAL

3

CPL/1142/CAO

Committee to monitor progress on the other confidence building measures mentioned in the report of the International Body.

12. We envisage that all participants will commit themselves to work constructively and in good faith with the two Governments and the Independent Commission to implement all aspects of the report of the International Body including the compromise approach to decommissioning envisaged in paragraphs 34 and 35. If these "possible conclusions" are agreed they could not subsequently be renegotiated and any further party invited to join the negotiations would need to affirm its acceptance of these commitments.

13. Above all, the "possible conclusions" and the covering paper setting out the position of the Governments, place a renewed emphasis on the role of the two Governments in respect of the decommissioning of illegal weapons. The two Governments give a formal joint undertaking to do all they can to ensure that the decommissioning issue is resolved to the satisfaction of the participants as an indispensable part of the process. We both pledge ourselves to work to achieve due progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the substantive political negotiations. We will seek to carry the whole process along with energy and determination.

14. There are many further points of detail in the joint paper which I am sure all parties will wish to study carefully. I look forward to hearing the parties' initial responses and then debating individual points with them. I will be urging them to reach agreement on the basis of these carefully crafted proposals. In my judgement they meet all legitimate concerns:

CONFIDENTIAL

616/5

15. The time has come to reach a determination on these matters. There is an urgent need to demonstrate that there is a credible political process, an opportunity for democratic dialogue with the potential to produce a valid and lasting political settlement. I commend the proposals set out in this joint paper as providing a reasonable and realistic basis for resolving the issue of decommissioning and moving onwards in the negotiations.

CONFIDENTIAL

5

CPL/1142/CAO

CONFIDENTIAL

6/6/6

GOVERNMENTS' JOINT PAPER ON DECOMMISSIONING

Press Line

1. The Secretary of State told the talks participants on 3 June that she wanted to see the decommissioning issue resolved "within weeks" and was determined to facilitate an agreement.
2. This is of course an important, complex and sensitive subject, but it has been under intensive discussion in the talks since last October and the time has come to reach a determination and move on.
3. The Independent Chairmen have sought to encourage agreement and the parties have all made considerable efforts to find a way forward, some of which have produced some progress. The two Governments, building on the progress already made and taking account of the clearly expressed views of the other participants, have today put forward for consideration a set of "possible conclusions" on the issue of decommissioning which they believe could win general support.
4. We have commended these proposals to the other participants but there will now be a process of consideration and discussion about them. We hope it will be possible to move to a determination before too long.
5. The two Governments' paper is based squarely on the Report of the International Body. If Sinn Fein join the talks, the paper envisages a process in which there would be due progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the substantive political negotiations. All

CONFIDENTIAL

6

CPL/1142/CAO

6/6/11

participants will need to commit themselves to work constructively and in good faith with the Governments and the Independent Commission in this regard.

6. There will be regular review plenaries to enable the participants to reflect on overall progress in the negotiations as a whole.
7. The paper does not envisage the creation of a "fourth strand" to "consider" decommissioning alongside the political negotiations. An Independent Commission on decommissioning will be established as the three strands are launched and given a remit to develop draft schemes for decommissioning and then to facilitate actual decommissioning accordingly. The necessary enabling legislation is of course already in place.
8. A sub-Committee of the Plenary will be established to liaise with the Independent Commission on decommissioning; and a distinct sub-Committee will be established to monitor progress on the other confidence building measures mentioned in the Report of the International Body.
9. Above all the paper places a renewed emphasis on the role of the two Governments. They have given a formal joint undertaking to do all they can to ensure that the decommissioning issue is resolved to the satisfaction of the participants as an indispensable part of the process. They have pledged themselves to work to achieve due progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the substantive political negotiations.
10. We will be urging the parties to reach agreement on the basis of these proposals.