

1972/16

CONCLUSIONS OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD AT STORMONT CASTLE
ON THURSDAY, 23 MARCH 1972 AT 4 30 PM

PRESENT: The Prime Minister
The Minister in the Senate
The Minister of Finance
The Minister of Health and Social Services
The Minister of Education
The Minister of Agriculture
The Minister of Commerce
The Minister of Development
The Minister of Community Relations
The Minister of State at the Ministry of Finance
The Minister of State at the Department of the Prime Minister

ALSO PRESENT: The Attorney General

The Secretary to the Cabinet
The Government Security Adviser
The Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet
The Principal

Ministers had before them -

- (a) note of main points made by Mr Heath at the Downing Street meeting on 22 March;
- (b) continuation note of the same meeting;
- (c) draft of statement to be issued in certain circumstances by the Prime Minister.

Opening the meeting the Prime Minister said that he had had a telephone call from Mr Heath informing him that the United Kingdom Cabinet had re-affirmed their decisions as conveyed at the Downing Street meeting the previous day. He, Mr Faulkner, had told Mr Heath in turn that the Government of Northern Ireland had also, after full consideration, maintained its position. Mr Heath had asked for further talks but had not disclosed the precise terms of reference.

Ministers generally took the view that there was little to be gained by trying any further to convince the United Kingdom Government to change its mind and that they were probably even then setting in motion the machinery for

take-over. Ministers noted with regret that Mr Heath had never, since he took office, seen fit to meet the Cabinet of Northern Ireland or even to visit Northern Ireland apart from a brief visit to the Army a few months previously.

Ministers discussed their positions with relation to any new form of administration and agreed that it would be right and proper for them to give all possible assistance in the transitional period.

All Ministers present signed a letter addressed to Mr Heath, stating that they had found both the proposed transfer of law and order powers and the possibility of further radical changes unrealistic and unacceptable and offering no clear advantage to those suffering in Northern Ireland. The letter continued by forecasting the resignation of the Government and warning of the grave consequences which might flow from it.

At the conclusion of the meeting the Prime Minister, the Minister in the Senate and senior officials left to fly to London.