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**FROM: F S WOODS
INFORMATION SERVICE
8 SEPTEMBER 1997**

cc Distribution

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - O

WEEKLY INFORMATION BULLETIN: 8 SEPTEMBER - 14 SEPTEMBER 1997

Prospects for the week

There will be intense and continuing media interest in the political process over the next few weeks. With the historic Talks getting underway on Tuesday we may well see the largest posse of journalists since the Clinton visit in the Province.

Starting on Monday there will be a very marked change of pace from the quiet period in the run-up to the funeral of the Princess of Wales.

A mix of Ministerial newspaper articles, briefings and interviews will be used to set the scene for Tuesday's plenary at which Sinn Fein will sign up to the Mitchell Principles. International media will return in strength to Castle Buildings and facilities are being improved to cope with the influx.

There will be no photographic coverage of the Talks or of Sinn Fein signing, although it will be made clear when this has happened. A high Ministerial profile will be sought - both domestic and international - to ram home the significance of the occasion.

The big question thereafter for media will be how the Unionists will play it. During their American visit Sinn Fein have been working to portray the Unionists as the villains for their reluctance to sit at the same table and in the process diverting attention from weapons stocks and decommissioning. Media reports and commentators locally meanwhile are reflecting Unionists disquiet and frustration about weapons, participation with Sinn Fein and the definition of consent.

The Ulster Unionists Executive Committee is due to meet on Saturday to discuss participation in Talks and all eyes will be on the outcome.

Although the members of the Decommissioning Body will not be formally appointed before Monday 15th some are due to arrive later in the week, probably in Dublin, where they will be welcomed as Commissioners designate by NI and ROI Ministers. Media handling is being further considered.

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On the security side, the Army is testing a 200ft long airship over North Antrim throughout the week. The trial is the last phase of a three year UK-wide programme to test the airship for defence and policing purposes but is sure to raise eyebrows and questions about ongoing surveillance during the ceasefire.

Opportunities this Week

A political scene-setting article by Mr Murphy will be offered to the Belfast Telegraph for use on Monday. Morning radio and television programmes will be targeted on Tuesday and every effort will be made to maximise interview and post-talks 'doorstep' opportunities later in the day.

An article will be offered to the News Letter for use on Thursday addressing more clearly unionist concerns. Later that day a possible visit to Belfast Harbour would offer a doorstep opportunity to reinforce any points in advance of the Unionist meeting on Saturday.

Ministerial attendance at the meeting of the British/Irish Association on Saturday and Sunday will be a useful opportunity for scene - setting in advance of substantive talks on Monday.

An outline media handling plan for the next 2-3 weeks has been put to the Minister for consideration.

KEY THEMES

Political

The Government is determined that substantive negotiations will take place from 15 September. We are looking forward to resumption of the talks and ultimately to wholehearted commitment and participation by all of the parties to constructive political discussion.

The Government's stated intention is to ensure that the vital principles of democracy underpin developments towards a long-term political settlement. Lasting stability must grow out of a broad consensus and the clearly articulated desire for disparate groupings to work together in the common interest. Consent has always been, and remains, the key issue in any proposals for change.

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The views of political leaders and their constituents are welcomed by the Government, which is committed to a more open and accountable approach. New institutions can and will be developed only in ways which take full account of the interests and aspirations of both communities.

The British and Irish governments agree that the way forward must be on the basis of implementing all aspects of the Mitchell report. These proposals offer a fair and balanced approach.

Sinn Fein/Ceasefire

Last week the Secretary of State made her decision that the IRA ceasefire, declared on 19 July, had been observed in both word and deed. As a consequence of this decision, she issued an immediate invitation to Sinn Fein to nominate representatives to the talks.

Sinn Fein will enter the talks when they reconvene on 9 September. At the plenary on that day, they will be required to affirm their commitment to the six Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence, as all the participants at the talks have previously done.

As a result of the ceasefire, the Secretary of State has already been able to meet Sinn Fein for a discussion on a wide range of issues including parades, prisoners, equality, security and confidence building.

Decommissioning

The Government is working closely with the Irish Government to ensure that all the necessary practical arrangements are in place to establish the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning so that it can begin work on a fully operational basis alongside the start of substantive negotiations on 15 September.

Consent

Both Governments remain fundamentally committed to the principle of consent in all its aspects, as set out both in United Kingdom law in section 1 of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act and in the Downing Street Declaration.

This means that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people. Moreover, we are

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committed to putting any agreed outcome to the negotiations to the people of Northern Ireland for approval in a referendum.

As far as the political negotiations are concerned the guarantees are even stronger. This is because of the "Triple Lock" which requires the consent of the parties, Parliament and the people of Northern Ireland themselves.

Prisons and Prisoners

All prisoners in Northern Ireland (except life sentence) are currently eligible for automatic release having served half their sentence and we are not considering earlier release at present. However, as the ceasefires hold other options become possible. Any change in the rules on remission would require legislation.

The Prison Service is continuing with its examination of working practices and other issues. UVF prisoners, due to be relocated soon, have been kept informed.

Security

We condemn without reservation any use of violence in whatever form, and will maintain our guard at all times.

Nevertheless the police and army have been able to take a number of measures following the ceasefire, including reductions in security force patrols and military support to the RUC, and this process will continue.

We will monitor the situation very closely and will not move more quickly than events on the ground allow. All of the steps taken can be quickly reversed if necessary.

Rights and Confidence Building

This Government is committed to the fundamental principles of fairness and justice; there will be no second-class citizens. We are determined to see full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural rights and freedom from discrimination for everyone. We are committed to building a society where the different identities are treated equally and enjoy mutual respect.

We will seek wherever possible initiatives to build confidence throughout the community and have announced a programme of specific measures including:- incorporation of the

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ECHR; combating discrimination in labour market; implementation of North Report. We will also seek to increase confidence in the RUC through reform of structures and the complaints system

These measures will threaten no-one and reflect sound principles which should underpin any fair minded society.

(Signed)

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