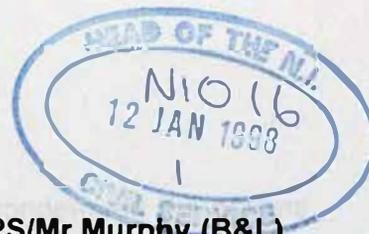


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FROM: R CLARKE
CENTRAL SECRETARIAT
DATE: 9 JANUARY 1998

CC: PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Semple
Mr Thomas (B&L)
Mr Steele
Mr Stephens
Mr Watkins
Mr Bell
PS/Mr Woods
Mr Beeton
Mr Brooker
Mrs Brown
Dr Canavan
Mr Carson
Mr Hill
Mr Ferguson
Mr Maccabe
Mr Whysall

PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

FORUM MEETING - 9 JANUARY 1998

1. This is to provide a report on today's meeting of the Forum, the 24th meeting of the Forum's new session and the 56th meeting since its inception. Returning from his spell in hospital, the Chairman thanked Deputy Chairman for standing in for him before Christmas. All parties joined in welcoming the Chairman's recovery and in wishing him continuing good health.

Summary

2. Alliance and OUP combined in a condemnation of the Secretary of State's visit to HMP Maze as an undermining of the current Talks process and the people's belief in the democratic process. The DUP also condemned the visit as an undermining of democracy, stating that the current Talks process was dead and calling for its replacement by a process in which the people of Northern Ireland had confidence.

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3. During the afternoon debate both the DUP and OUP condemned the actions of successive Irish governments in failing to introduce workable extradition arrangements and in preventing its territory from being regarded as a safe haven for republican terrorists.

Detail

4. The Chairman explained that there was a need for consistency across the sub-committees of the Forum in whether the Chair was allowed to vote during debates. He proposed that the Forum's rules should be made more explicit and proposed the motion that when voting took place in Committee the Chairperson should not be entitled to vote except when the votes were equal, in which case the Chairperson should exercise a casting vote. The motion was carried by voice vote.

5. The morning debate was concerned with the events which had taken place since the Forum had last met. Mr Trimble, in opening the debate condemned the murders in Belfast, Dungannon and HMP Maze and the attempted bombing of Banbridge. He stated that these actions had been designed to destabilise the Province, encourage tit for tat outrages and be used as an excuse for a return to widespread violence. He urged the people of Northern Ireland not to assist the republican strategy by reacting to outrages. Unfortunately the climate of violence was being encouraged by a general lack of confidence in the political process and in democratic debate. Recent actions led people to the belief that both Governments were influenced by violence or the threat of violence. The UUP was attempting to develop the way ahead through peaceful means and on 15 December in Castle Buildings the party had reached agreement with SDLP on a paper detailing key issues which had to be resolved. Unfortunately the Irish Government, with the tacit support of the British Government, had allowed Sinn Fein to veto progress. If confidence in the democratic process was to be restored positive action is

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required and the Governments would have to stop pandering to those responsible for the violence.

6. The DUP joined in condemning all paramilitaries and all acts of violence without reservation or equivocation. Several speakers went on to condemn the Talks process on the grounds that it had been designed to provide the Government with a framework within which it could negotiate with the IRA and try to buy them off at the expense of the people of Northern Ireland. They went on to condemn the Secretary of State's visit to HMP Maze as an undermining of the democratic process. It was obvious that attention was only being paid to those who carried out, or threatened, acts of violence and that the opinions of peaceful people were being ignored. As a result, people had lost confidence in the ability of politicians to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland. It was obvious that the current Talks process was dead and should be replaced with a process in which only true democrats were involved.

7. All speakers from the Alliance Party condemned the Secretary of State's visit to HMP Maze. The Talks process had been based on the Mitchell principles which excluded not only acts of violence but the threat of violence, yet the Secretary of State had undermined the democratic process in general, and the UDP and PUP in particular, by showing that she was only interested in their paramilitary backers, not in politicians or their electors. Not only did this undermine the peace process but it would not achieve anything because the paramilitaries would decide their future actions on an analysis of what their best interests were, not on what the Secretary of State said to them. At best all that could be achieved would be a short-term reduction in violence until the next issue appeared. All paramilitaries had breached their cease-fires through murder or intimidation and they were not interested in the democratic process. By talking and listening to them the Secretary of State had buried the Mitchell principles and there was no need to move the Talks to Austria or Finland - they had already moved to the Maze.

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8. The only support for the Secretary of State's visit to HMP Maze came from the Women's Coalition, PUP and UDP parties who all considered that she was leaving no stone unturned in her search for peace.
9. The other issue generating debate concerned conditions within HMP Maze. Several speakers condemned the regime within it as being too lax and allowing the prisoners to dictate terms within it. All previous enquiries into incidents had been whitewashes and several DUP speakers called for an independent, open and sworn enquiry so that the facts could be placed before the people. During his speech Rev. W. McCrea provided the Forum with details of copies of documents from the prison and used them to show how he considered that a conspiracy had occurred in the murder of Billy Wright. He joined with the others in calling for an independent open enquiry to discover and identify who had been responsible.
10. The motion had appeared in the Chairman's name as a "take note" motion and was carried by voice vote.
11. In the afternoon debate only the DUP and UUP made contributions. The feeling was unanimous that the Government of the Irish Republic had significantly failed to honour its obligations in the field of extradition and in implementing the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. Details were given that prior to 1961 a custom had grown up that extradition was achieved by the expedient of escorting suspects to the border and handing them over to the RUC. Since then, the Irish Government had implemented flawed legislation containing loopholes which effectively prevented extradition except in a limited number of cases. It was felt that this was a deliberate policy designed to reflect and uphold the ethos of Irish republicanism. As a result the Irish Republic was a safe haven within which terrorists were free to plan and orchestrate a campaign of violence which was then conducted in Northern Ireland. Fugitives from British justice lived openly

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in the Republic and often received State aid. It appeared that no matter how heinous the crimes they had committed they were free from the threat of extradition provided they could claim that their crimes were politically motivated.

12. In addition to condemning successive Irish Governments, several speakers condemned their British counterparts for failing to bring the Irish government to account and ensuring that they passed legislation that was practical and workable. In view of the Irish Government's lack of commitment in meeting its international obligations one speaker suggested that the record of the Forum's debate on the subject should be passed to the 17 Governments which had signed the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism in order to highlight the failure of the Irish Government in this area. All speakers united to call for urgent action to redress the current deplorable situation. It was pointed out that if the Irish Government took action to extradite terrorists and prevent its territory from being a safe haven for terrorists this would be a real and substantial confidence building measure to the people of Northern Ireland.

13. After the motion was passed by voice vote (only the DUP and UUP were present) the Chairman gave his ruling on whether it would comply with rule 13.1. He explained that while he had warned Ian Paisley Junior, at the meeting of the Business Committee, that the motion was contentious that the facts presented during the debate could not be gainsaid and if widely known would be acceptable. He was, therefore, of the opinion that the motion was acceptable under rule 13.1.

Reg Clarke

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MOTIONS

The Chairman to propose the following motion:-

In accordance with Rule 14(6) the Forum orders that when voting takes place in Committee the Chairperson shall not be entitled to vote; save that when the votes are equal the Chairperson shall exercise a casting vote.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Business Committee, to propose the following motion:-

This Forum takes note of the events which have taken place since it last met.

The Democratic Unionist Party to propose the following motion:-

This Forum deprecates the appalling record of the Irish Republic in relation to extradition and calls on the Government of the Irish Republic to reform its extradition procedures and prevent its jurisdiction being exploited as a safe haven for terrorists.

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