

SEAN FARREN

**SDLP ASSEMBLY MEMBER
(North Antrim)**

*The Good Friday Agreement: Eighteen Months On –
What Does the Future Hold?*

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- 1. The Agreement consists of three main strands:
constitutional, political and confidence building.**

- 2. The constitutional deals with the Government of
Ireland Act & Articles 2&3 of the Irish Constitution.**

- 3. The political strand deals with the Assembly and its
Executive, the NSMC, the British-Irish Council and
the Civic Forum.**

- 4. Confidence building measures include: prisoner
releases, policing, equality, economic and cultural
development; criminal justice system;
decommissioning.**

- 5. Progress recorded on many of the issues in each strand. The strand recording least progress is the political.**

- 6. The 1920 Government of Ireland Act has been repealed and provision has been made for Articles 2&3 of the Irish Constitution to be amended to include the principle of consent as the basis for achieving Irish unity.**

- 7. The only political institution in place is the Assembly;**

- 8. Agreement reached in December on the Assembly Executive's departmental arrangements and on the responsibilities of the NSMC, the failure to form the Executive has prevented moves to establish the NSMC as well as the British-Irish Council and the Civic Forum.**

9. Progress on the confidence building measures varies from measure to measure:

- i. Prisoners: releases have been taking place regularly since last autumn and are likely to be completed within the time-scale foreseen;**
- ii. Policing: the Patten Commission has presented its report and the government is planning for its implementation;**
- iii. Equality: the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission have been established and are setting about meeting their responsibilities;**
- iv. Economic development: a new strategy document has been published by the DED and is being keenly studied by interested groups;**
- v. Cultural development: plans are being developed to develop greater cultural awareness;**
- vi. The criminal justice system is being reviewed and reforms will be published soon.**

9. Decommissioning - the one Confidence Building Measure on which no progress has been recorded.

10. The Report of the International Body chaired by Senator Mitchell indicated in February 1996 that it had concluded that:

“there is a clear commitment on the part of those in possession of such arms to work constructively to achieve full and verifiable decommissioning as part of the process of all-party negotiations...”

11. The GFA itself repeated this commitment but, as yet, it remains to be delivered upon. Indeed evidence that ‘working constructively’ to this end has even started is not yet available.

Mitchell Review

The review will take as its starting point the three principles agreed by all pro-Agreement parties on 25 June:

- (i) an inclusive Executive (i.e. SDLP, Sinn Fein, UUP and DUP) exercising devolved powers;**

- (ii) decommissioning of all paramilitary arms by May 2000;**

- (iii) decommissioning to be carried out in a manner determined by the International Commission on Decommissioning;**

and will determine how to overcome the difficulties which exist in the practical implementation of those principles.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

1. A fully functioning set of political institutions?

- (i) Executive & Assembly exercising devolved powers;**
- (ii) North-South Ministerial Council exercising executive and consultative responsibility for a range functions on an all-island basis;**
- (iii) British-Irish Council linking the parliaments and devolved assemblies in Ireland and Britain;**
- (iv) Civic Forum offering a consultative role to the social partners in Northern Ireland;**

2. All Confidence Building Measures being implemented?

Or !!!!!!!!!!!