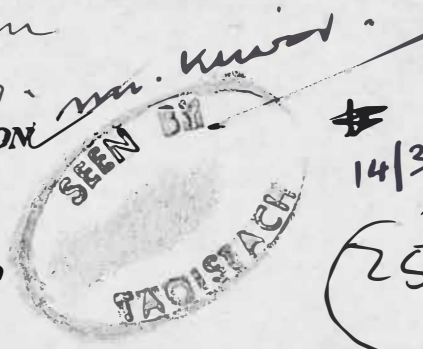




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23.3.97
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**C O V E R****FAX****S H E E T**

TO: Mr. W. Kinn, Asst. Sec.,
D / Tarrish.

DATE: 5.3.97

FOR: —

FROM: S. Hara.

Taoiseach
The talks are
now parked
until 3 June

NUMBER OF PAGES (including this cover sheet):

9

W. Kinn
5-3-97

Subject: Statement by Insp. Channon re Dr. Remond
Comments: used by Tarrish at conclusion of Channon for
ref.

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Office of the Independent Chairmen

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5 March 1997

STATEMENT BY THE INDEPENDENT CHAIRMEN

At a plenary meeting today, and in other bilateral meetings over the past week, the Independent Chairmen have reviewed the present state of the multi-party negotiations.

Since the process began on 10 June last year, following elections on 30 May, a series of meetings has been held in plenary, bilateral and other formations. The participants are agreed that the talks process, which allows for inclusive negotiations on a comprehensive agenda, between parties committed to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process, remains the key instrument in the search for progress. The process has underlined the belief, shared by all the participants, that a stable and peaceful future for Northern Ireland can only be secured through democratic negotiations.

All the participants have restated their belief that violence, for political ends, can and should have no place in Northern Ireland, whichever section of the community those who perpetrate it claim to represent. The participants are united in wishing to see an immediate and permanent end to all violence.

The Independent Chairmen are pleased to note that, as a result of discussions during the talks process, the participants negotiated and agreed, on 29 July 1996, detailed Rules of Procedure governing the structure and conduct of negotiations. The participants also went on to discuss and agree, in October, an agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary, setting out the subjects to be considered and the order in which they are to be addressed.

Since mid-October, the participants have been discussing item 2 on the agenda. This relates to the issue of decommissioning and, in particular, the report of the International Body. The discussions, which have taken place both in the plenary and bilateral and multilateral meetings between the various participants, have been lengthy and detailed. As a result of these discussions, the participants

-more-

General John de Chastelain

Senator George J. Mitchell

Prime Minister Harri Holkeri

5-MAR-97 WED 17:13

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have all obtained a clearer understanding of each other's views. However, despite the efforts of all concerned, while some areas of potential agreement have been identified, no basis has yet emerged for reaching agreement on this agenda item.

In the circumstances, bearing in mind that the Easter holiday period will be followed in quick succession by a General Election in the United Kingdom and district council elections in Northern Ireland (due to take place on 21 May), the Independent Chairmen proposed that the next plenary session be held on Tuesday 3 June. This has been agreed by the plenary.

We look forward to resuming the negotiations in June with renewed vigour and commitment, and to working with the participants in completing the address to the International Body's proposals on decommissioning. This would enable the negotiations to move to consideration of the substantive political issues concerning a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, with the island of Ireland, and between the two Governments.

This is obviously a difficult process. Progress has been slow. But there is no alternative to meaningful democratic dialogue. We repeat our total condemnation of the use of violence to resolve political issues and we restate our personal commitment to the pursuit of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

-end-

For further information contact Kelly Currie (01232 522957)

Not for Publication

Multi-Party Negotiations: Plenary Session, 5 March 1997
Draft Remarks by Tánaiste on behalf of Irish Government Delegation

Mr. Chairman,

For some nine months now delegations have been meeting around this table. We have pledged ourselves, in terms participants explicitly adopted as their own, to "negotiate in good faith, seriously address all aspects of the agreed agenda, and make every effort to reach a comprehensive agreement".

These talks have required a major investment of time and energy on the part of every delegation. I believe that investment was made unstintingly by all of us, and certainly so on the part of the Irish Government. There is quite simply no more important task on any of our agendas than the one facing us at this table. There is none with greater implications for all our futures.

Success would be a watershed in our history. It would mean that we would have achieved what I believe must be the goal and the sustaining hope of every serious democratic politician here, namely to change the future decisively for the better as a result of our collective efforts.

If we fail, we can be sure of one thing: Failure in this enterprise will never be merely neutral. We will have left the situation worse than we found it because we will have added to the sense of despair that our problems are beyond the capacity of rational democratic politicians to resolve.

Let me stress that I do not for one moment believe this to be the case. Our efforts here do have the potential to transform the situation, if only we mobilise the political will to do so. It is premature, as of yet, to talk either of the success or failure of

these Talks. I believe realistically, however, the balance will inevitably begin to tilt, and the patterns begin to set in one direction or the other before very much longer, and certainly before the end of the year.

Whatever the outcome, one thing is already clear: Everything that skilled and scrupulously impartial chairmanship could contribute to the success of the process has been most generously at our disposal from the outset. We are greatly indebted to our three Chairmen and also to their most able and professional staff, and to the Governments of the United States, Canada and Finland for having facilitated their participation. On behalf of the Irish Government, I want to place on record our heartfelt thanks for these dedicated efforts. We greatly appreciate the invaluable lessons of courtesy, forbearance, and even in some cases resilience, exemplified for us by Chairmen and staff alike, who so disinterestedly embody the international support for this process.

It is too soon to pronounce any definitive verdict on our prospects. It is timely however to take stock of where we are, and to draw up an interim balance-sheet.

On the credit side, we have a workable process in place. It is sufficiently comprehensive in scope to embrace all concerns. We have been able to agree detailed rules of procedure and an agenda for this opening plenary. We have obtained a clearer understanding of each other's views and perspectives. No-one can have expected these negotiations to be easy, or the accumulated problems and distrust of centuries to be speedily resolved. The mere fact that we are still all sitting round the same table is not a negligible achievement. Everything we need is now to hand, if we can only summon the political will to make proper use of the instruments available to us.

On the debit side, I do not believe anyone could have anticipated that after so many months we would still be stuck in the opening plenary without even touching on the issue that is central both to this process, and to our vocation as democratic politicians, namely forging a new political agreement and shaping new arrangements and institutions to put in place of strife. That failure is doing damage to the credibility of the process of democratic negotiations itself. That cannot be a matter of indifference to anyone around this table. We all know only too well who the winners and losers from it will be.

If we draw the lessons of the process so far, I believe our disappointing lack of progress related to three sets of difficulties:

The first were the uncertainties engendered by the collapse of the IRA ceasefire. Some parties have hovered uncertainly between using our existing format to its full potential and looking forward with apprehension to the possibility of a fully inclusive process. The process so far has sadly combined the disadvantages of both approaches and offered the advantages of neither.

The position of the Irish Government on this issue has been clear and consistent. Violence is utterly wrong. It must be rigorously opposed and condemned and can be allowed no say in the negotiating process.

The Taoiseach and I, and all of the party leaders in Dáil Éireann, have repeatedly denounced all acts of violence, and have spelled out to the republican movement the utter abhorrence with which we, and the vast majority of the Irish people, regard all IRA atrocities. We have gone on to make clear that such acts are futile, counter-productive, and quite at odds with the logic of their stated position.

Together with the British Government we have set out clear and demanding rules in respect of participation in the Talks. The issue is not whether we would prefer the talks to be inclusive. It would be perverse for any democrat to argue that it is desirable in itself for any significant electoral constituency to be excluded. The debate must rather be about whether the conditions we have laid out for participation are being met. They are manifestly not being met at the moment. The absence of Sinn Féin shows that the standards we have set are indeed challenging and exacting. In those circumstances I wish we could have simply registered and deplored the absence of Sinn Féin, and got down to business. That would have made clear that their absence exerted no veto on our progress. For our part, we see no reason on the other hand to foreclose the possibility of their participation in the event of any genuine change of heart in the future.

Instead of that sensible and pragmatic approach, which I believe could have made valuable progress even without Sinn Féin, our process has been stalled ironically on the one single issue of the entire agenda where Sinn Féin involvement is essential for progress, namely decommissioning. I think that has sent an unfortunate and confusing signal.

Our process has been deadlocked on decommissioning in a formal sense since mid-October last, and in an informal sense for much longer. It is valuable and uncontested common ground on all sides that this is one of the essential goals to be achieved by this process. The road-map to that goal has been set out with great skill and objectivity in the Mitchell report. If decommissioning is ever actually achieved, it is a very safe prediction that it will be recognisably on that basis. Both Governments are fully committed to the implementation of all aspects of the Body's report. As an indication of our intent the Irish Government have already enacted legislation to allow for decommissioning to take place within our jurisdiction in accordance with the recommendations of the Body. We appreciate the

understandable anger and fears of the unionist community on this issue. Indeed these sentiments are widely held on all sides. That is surely however a reason to join with the Governments and other delegations in working patiently to create the conditions which will actually make decommissioning a reality, and avoiding merely wishful or symbolic approaches to the issue which actually undermine that goal.

The third factor inhibiting progress, and doing so ever more patently, is the imminence of the elections whose shadow has lain across our work for some time now. Unlike the other difficulties, this is one which time itself will remedy. It remains only for us to make sensible allowance for it.

The statement which you, Mr. Chairman, made at the beginning of our meeting was carefully considered, and clearly the fruit of painstaking consultation. The issues we face are too deep and far-reaching to be dealt with in the short-term and tactical perspectives which inevitably tend to come to the fore in the heat of an election. For that reason it seems prudent and realistic to take time out from our work and to resume, as you suggest, on 2nd June.

We remain fully committed to the present negotiations based on the principle of consent as the only viable means of achieving a lasting settlement. We look forward, as you did in your opening statement, to resuming our work after the elections, we hope in an atmosphere of renewed vigour and commitment.

Let us not lose sight of the inestimable prize of an honourable settlement which would accommodate the aspirations and identities of both communities and traditions, and would provide for new patterns of productive partnership here in Northern Ireland, within Ireland and between Britain and Ireland. Part of such an agreement would be constitutional change which would definitively enshrine the principle of consent, in the fullest sense, as the basis for Northern Ireland's status. Let us resolve that when

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we next meet formally in June our deliberations will be informed by a sense of that potential, and that our ambitions and determination will be equal to the task ahead.

In the meantime, while wishing each of you who may be involved in the forthcoming elections all the luck you may individually or collectively deserve, I would confirm the Irish Government's readiness to meet any party or parties bilaterally or multilaterally to prepare for the resumption of the negotiations.

Finally, while I will have other opportunities to speak to him at greater length and more personally, I would like to place on the record here my very best wishes to the Secretary of State on his impending retirement from the House of Commons. Our years of joint stewardship have been full and eventful. There have been moments of great sadness and tragedy, and times of hope and optimism. But the relationship between the two Governments has endured all strains and tensions: indeed it has strengthened over the past five years, and has been placed on a new footing through the Joint Declaration and the common endeavour that has flowed from it. Sir Patrick's distinguished personal attributes and political skills have been brought to bear on a significant period in our history, and I would wish him and Lady Jean all the best in what we hope will be a long and happy retirement.