



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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h. J. Kelly  
15/11  
18-11-91

NOTE

"Initiative 92 Commission in Northern Ireland"

1. I had a call from Mr. Robin Wilson, editor of Fortnight magazine who said he wanted to brief me in on a proposed informal Commission to be set up to canvas views and report on possible ways forward on the Northern Ireland problem. He himself has been active with Queens Law Professor Simon Lee in preparing this initiative for some time. Funding has been made available from the Rowntree Trust and they were hopeful of other contributions to make up the £250,000 they estimated the enterprise would cost. Their proposal is for a seven member Commission, drawn from both North and South, Britain and the EC (possibly with the latter member as Chairperson). The terms of reference, which are as yet confidential, are attached. There will be a full-time Secretariat of two people. They hope to have Church leaders and other similarly distinguished figures as patrons of the enterprise. They intend to formally launch the proposal at the end of the month, and announce the membership at the end of the year. The 'Commissioners' would invite submissions and begin work in January with a view to publishing a report at the end of 1992. Mr. Wilson said the British Government had been informed and had promised 'benign neutrality'. His hope was the Irish Government could adopt a similar posture, and not discourage anyone who, for example might consult us on membership of the Commission or on the value of making a submission to it.

I said I assumed that this would in fact be our posture. Generally anything which promoted reflection and encouraged dialogue on Northern Ireland in a fair and open way would be seen as positive. As Mr. Wilson would no doubt himself be aware, the selection of the membership of the Commission would be of great importance for the credibility and public perception of the enterprise (he gave no indication of who they were considering, beyond saying that they thought of

eminent specialists in legal, economic etc. affairs rather than practising politicians. He stresses they were anxious to ensure that both the terms of reference and the membership opened the debate as widely as possible.

*ASH*  
S. O' hUiginn

14 November 1991

*enc 1*  
*PSH*  
*PSS*  
*Mr Nally*  
*Joint Sec*  
*Ambassador London*  
*Counsellors #1*

E2779

INITIATIVE '92 aims to broaden participation in the dialogue about the future of Northern Ireland, and to deepen that debate in terms of clarifying the issues at stake, through the establishment of an open, independent commission of inquiry into ways forward for the region. This will seek to inform any future initiatives by government and perhaps to prepare the public for eventual acceptance of any new arrangements for Northern Ireland.

A team of seven commissioners is shortly to be appointed, from Great Britain and Ireland as well as from Northern Ireland, and perhaps from further afield. They will be selected because of their expertise in legal, political, social or other relevant areas, and for their independence of mind.

In the new year, the commission will be formally established, and the commissioners will invite submissions from any individual or organisation, examine those they wish to probe further at public hearings, and report on their conclusions and findings. Particular effort will be made by a supporting secretariat to secure the widest possible input, not only from political parties and individual politicians but also from groups within 'civil society' traditionally outside the political process.

The hearings, which will not be confined to Belfast, will begin in February/March, with a view to concluding the bulk of them before the Westminster general election, whenever precisely that is. Afterwards, the commissioners will be primarily involved in drafting their report, which we would hope would be ready later in the year.

The commission will be funded by a consortium of trusts—positive signals have already been received and major decisions are imminent. The budget is in the region of £1/4 million.

The terms of reference of the commission will be as follows:

*To investigate ways forward with regard to the problems of Northern Ireland which could command widespread acceptance in the context of relationships throughout these islands and in Europe, through:*

- *soliciting submissions from any interested individual, group or organisation,*
- *examining at public hearings such of their advocates and any other individuals as the commissioners wish to invite, and*
- *commissioning opinion research as appropriate.*

*To work to an open agenda, which would include submissions on:*

- *constitutional change for Northern Ireland,*
- *issues of law and justice,*
- *social and economic issues, and/or*
- *other relevant concerns.*

*To report, in two parts, on:*

- (i) *the evidence received by the commission, and*
- (ii) *its analysis of this evidence and such options and recommendations as it sees fit to advance, to such bodies as appropriate.*

*To disseminate this report as widely as possible and to solicit and evaluate responses to it.*