



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/97/1

**Creator(s):** Department of the Taoiseach

**Accession Conditions:** Open

**Copyright:** National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

*Meeting with Sinn Féin Delegation,*

*Thursday, 22 June, 1995*

1. The Taoiseach, Mr. John Bruton, T.D., and the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Dick Spring, T.D., met in Government Buildings on 22 June with a Sinn Féin delegation comprising the Party President, Mr. Gerry Adams, the Vice-President, Mr. Pat Doherty, the General-Secretary, Ms. Lucilita Bhreathnach and Mr. Aiden McAteer. Following is a summary report of the meeting.
2. The Taoiseach, in his opening remarks, referred to the letter (copy attached) which he had sent to Mr. Adams in advance of the meeting. He wanted to get a sense of what, realistically, Sinn Féin felt about the prospects for Unionist participation in talks. He also wished to hear what Sinn Féin felt they could do to help get the British Prime Minister off the decommissioning hook. The Irish Government were looking to Sinn Féin to help them to help the British Government off this hook. The Taoiseach also asked Sinn Féin to say what they could do to stop punishment beatings and to assist in locating the remains of those who had "disappeared" during the Troubles. Anything that Sinn Féin could do to show tangible progress in areas of concern such as these would assist in bringing about movement by the British Government on other issues.
3. Responding, Mr. Adams referred to the need for a good working relationship between Sinn Féin and the Irish Government and expressed his disappointment at the Taoiseach's letter - and the fact that it had been faxed to him. Sinn Féin had requested the meeting to find a way out of the current impasse. They had already briefed the Taoiseach on all the issues he had referred to, including punishment beatings and the question of the "disappeared". It was very important to recognise that the current opportunity had come about because he (Mr. Adams), John Hume and the Government etc. had worked together to create it. Mr. Adams had always said - and this was a main tenet - that he would not deceive anybody and that he would not deceive the IRA. He had said the same thing to Mr. Reynolds. Decommissioning had to be dealt with in the framework of moving the entire process forward. The British Prime Minister was saying that there could not be all-party talks until decommissioning had taken place. The Taoiseach's letter suggested that he too saw (some) decommissioning as a precondition to all-party talks. When Mr. Adams saw the letter he had felt that defences were being prepared (against a breakdown of the ceasefire?).
4. The Taoiseach said that while the issues in question had indeed been discussed on previous occasions, he was not satisfied that he fully understood Sinn Féin's position. His purpose in sending a letter to Mr. Adams in advance of the meeting was to avoid "bouncing" Sinn Féin with these issues at the meeting and to allow Sinn Féin the opportunity of coming up with a definitive response. On the question of decommissioning, the Taoiseach had time and again emphasised that this was not a British Government inspired issue - it was one which Unionists - essential participants in all-party talks - felt strongly about.

5. Mr. Adams said that if there was something we could move on, then let's move. He had had on (*date*) what he considered to be an important meeting with the Taoiseach and Mr. Donlon, where reference had been made to the need for a concrete formula (on decommissioning). Mr. Adams had said at that meeting that he was prepared to use his influence with the IRA. However, Sinn Fein were still waiting for the formula.
6. The Taoiseach said that on the contrary, his understanding was that we were waiting for Sinn Féin to produce a formula. Sinn Féin had influence with the IRA and were in the best position to produce a formula. The Taoiseach said that he would like Sinn Féin to give us a formula that we could present to the British Government.
7. Mr. Adams commented that there was obviously a misunderstanding here although he added that Sinn Féin were working on a strategy. It was wrong of the Irish Government to see itself as a go-between between the British Government and Sinn Féin. There would not have been a cessation of violence if the Irish Government had not clearly focused on trying to move the situation forward. He felt that on the decommissioning issue, there was a need for Sinn Féin and the Irish Government to use their combined ability to move matters forward. The British Government was not going to get a gesture. However, if the British Government could move, Sinn Féin would be able to move, in a situation of give and take. Mr. Adams said that it was disgraceful that the British Government had not indicated their time-frame for discussions on the Framework Document. No one knew either what was the Irish Government's time-frame.
8. Mr. Adams referred to the Taoiseach's earlier question about the disappeared. The IRA had said that they would assist in locating the remains of those who had disappeared in cases where they had been involved or where they otherwise had knowledge. Asked by the Taoiseach what had happened on foot of this understanding, Mr. Adams said that he had for some time been carrying out his own investigations in this area. In one case - the Crossmaglen women - it was clear the IRA were in no way involved and this was accepted by relatives. In another, the IRA again were not involved although the individuals concerned were believed to be dead and if the IRA could help in locating the remains they would do so. The case of a woman who had disappeared in the 1970's was still being investigated. Mr. Adams said, in response to a query from the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, that he could give a time-frame for concluding these investigations.
9. Turning to punishment beatings, Mr. Adams said that this wasn't the issue. The problem was that people didn't trust the RUC. Mr. Adams sympathised with the situation of those who suffered at the hands of criminals: if he witnessed people being attacked by criminals, he would "give them a rap" himself. People wanted policing but so far the question of policing had not been addressed. Mr. Adams added that RUC members were still getting £100 overtime payments despite the new situation arising from the ceasefires.

10. On the questions raised in the Taoiseach's letter, Mr. Adams said that the question was whether we were going to accept that the peace process would move on. The Taoiseach agreed, adding that there was a problem here. If there was to be an agreement, the Unionists would have to participate and there would have to be talks between Unionists and Sinn Féin. The problem was that Unionists would not negotiate under duress. Mr. Adams said that there was a need for a strategic overview as to how to proceed to an overall settlement. The Unionists would not talk to Sinn Féin in a situation where they had every encouragement not to do so - by virtue of the British Government's refusal to talk to Sinn Féin. The Irish Government side had better strategists than Sinn Féin but clearly there was a need to open the door politically. The British Government were at present playing a tactical game in seeking to break the nationalist consensus, using the decommissioning issue. They knew that they would not get a surrender of IRA weapons. The Taoiseach had opened up the first chink in the nationalist consensus when he made his remarks about a decommissioning gesture.
11. The Taoiseach said that he had used the word "gesture" in the sense of a political -rather than a physical - gesture and he referred to the circumstances (a door-step by Charlie Bird) in which he had made the remark. What the Taoiseach was looking for was some form of commitment on decommissioning that would be saleable. Responding to comments from the Sinn Féin side that the British Government e.g. Sir Patrick Mayhew were quoting the Taoiseach's remarks in support of their demand for a physical gesture, the Taoiseach said that he would be quite happy to disillusion Sir Patrick. At the same time, he did not attribute the same significance to his remarks as did Mr. Adams.
12. Returning to the need for a strategic overview, Mr. Adams said that despite the cessation of violence, there had been no movement on prisoners in the UK - or in Ireland since Easter; the EPA had been renewed; and the British Government had been farting about with so-called exploratory talks. Sinn Féin on the other hand had agreed on the principle that all guns should be taken out and they were prepared to agree a transitional political settlement and to take a chance that this would be enough to secure decommissioning and to use their influence to this end. Mr. Adams emphasised the significance of the change in the traditional all or nothing approach of republicans to a United Ireland, describing it in terms of saying that black is white. Mr. Adams added that he was prepared privately to get a way out of the decommissioning problem. There would not be a surrender/decommissioning of IRA weapons (at this stage). What was needed was a formula that could be worked on and presented to the IRA and subsequently, by the Taoiseach, to the British.
13. The Taoiseach sought to clarify Sinn Féin's position, referring back to the question which he had put to Mr. Adams at the meeting on *(date)*: would Sinn Féin be prepared to agree on a contingency plan concerning the modalities for decommissioning? Mr. Adams said that the answer - as he had indicated on many occasions previously - was "Yes". The problem was that the British Government would talk about nothing else apart from decommissioning in the course of the exploratory dialogue. People would not move on decommissioning unless there was something else on offer in return.

14. The Taoiseach asked if Sinn Féin were satisfied that they had exhausted all the subjects for discussion and all possible scope for progress in the exploratory talks. Mr. Adams said this was "absolutely" the case. The problem was that the British Government were not engaging with Sinn Féin in the same way as the Irish Government: if the Taoiseach were to focus exclusively on decommissioning, rather than - as they were - talking about other issues as well, Mr. Adams would not be talking to him. [Mr. Adams mentioned in passing that Quentin Thomas had developed some small rapport with Martin McGuinness].
15. The Taoiseach said that we needed to know whether, if we tried to persuade the British Government to change their stance on decommissioning - on the basis of a contingent, detailed written agreement on modalities - Sinn Féin would sign on. Mr. Adams said that without prejudice and in principle, the answer was "Yes". There was a need to get around the decommissioning issue. At the same time, Sinn Féin would not go on fishing trips (with the IRA). They needed to have a time - frame (for political progress). It had also to be recognised that Sinn Féin could not speak for the IRA and that the IRA might say "No" to whatever was proposed or that they might wish to change this or that element in it.
16. The Taoiseach said that, apart from decommissioning, there was another roadblock - the problem of engaging the Unionists. Mr. Adams repeated that the Unionists would only move when the British Government moved. Unionists needed to "go through a crisis". Many ordinary unionists recognised that there would have to be change and there were signs that attitudes were changing.
17. Returning to the decommissioning issue, the Taoiseach said that he understood that the British Government had supplied Sinn Féin with a paper on the subject. He asked if Sinn Féin could give us any idea as to what amendments or counter - proposals they might wish to make. The Taoiseach also asked in particular if Sinn Féin had any view on the question of external involvement in the decommissioning process. Mr. Adams indicated that the British Government paper was unacceptable on the grounds that it called for the making a gesture. The Taoiseach asked if the rest of the paper (covering the practicalities , legalities etc. of decommissioning) could be drawn on as the basis for an approach to the British Government to move away from the gesture aspect. Mr. Adams objected that he could not simply go back to the IRA and say that we were looking at the legalities of handing over IRA weapons. He needed to be able to show then as well what would happen in the talks framework. The Taoiseach said that this was fully accepted and understood by the Irish Government. However, we needed to reach agreement on the practical detail of decommissioning which could be shown to the British Government. Mr. Adams said that we should avoid discussions by proxy with the British Government: we needed our own strategic overview.
18. Mr. Adams said that he was prepared to use his influence with the IRA on decommissioning but that he would only do this if it were linked to political progress; and that Prime Minister Major had to drop his demand for a gesture. The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs suggested that the demand for a gesture represented the British Government's hardest line position: the Irish Government, for their part,

were fully aware of what Sinn Fein could or could not deliver. Mr. Adams said that in this case, the Irish side should give Sinn Féin a paper, adding that this "had to be a political thing". He could not go to the IRA with a paper on modalities and an indication that he might come back the next week with a timeframe for political talks.

The Taoiseach said that the Irish Government could not deliver the Unionists. Asked by Mr. Adams if the Government had a plan for the peace process, he referred to the Framework Document and its overarching strategy for parity of esteem. The agreement of the British Government to the Framework Document represented a major advance. Our plan was to move simultaneously on two tracks - decommissioning/security/justice and the political talks. We wished to make progress as quickly as possible but the decommissioning issue was preventing movement. Mr. Adams said that Sinn Féin would envisage that the proposed paper would cover both a formula for removing the decommissioning roadblock and a broad strategy for moving the political process forward. The Taoiseach and the Tánaiste said that there would be no problem in proceeding on these lines.

19. The Taoiseach said that the paper would have to contain more than just a declaration on decommissioning: it would have to address "nuts and bolts". Mr. Adams raised the question as to whether the paper should draw on the British Government paper on decommissioning and concluded that it should not. The Taoiseach commented that there was always value in drawing on other people's ideas where possible. Mr. Adams said this was a fair enough point - in any event, there was no need to worry about it at this meeting.
20. The Taoiseach referred to his forthcoming meeting with Prime Minister Major in Cannes, noting that, given the Prime Minister's current political difficulties, it was not expected to be a breakthrough meeting. He asked if Mr. Adams would wish us to convey any particular message to the Prime Minister. Mr. Adams said that we should ask him to tell Sir Patrick Mayhew to respond positively to Sinn Féin's request for a meeting. We should also tell him that a decommissioning gesture was not on and that the peace process had to move on. Mr. Adams added that in the light of the Prime Minister's political difficulties, Irish Government strength would have to substitute for British Government weakness.
21. The Taoiseach returned to the question of Sinn Féin's position on the exploratory talks. Mr. Adams said that Sinn Fein were not willing to continue with exploratory discussions. However, they were willing to talk to Sir Patrick Mayhew; Martin McGuinness was willing to meet with Michael Ancram; and Sinn Féin were prepared to talk to Ministers where the need arose. The Taoiseach said that we could use the precedent of the Adams/Mayhew meeting in Washington as leverage to encourage the British side to move (on further talks at this level).
22. Mr. Adams said that he did not feel that a crisis existed at this point but that we were building towards a crisis. [No one should be under any illusion that the IRA was war - weary - check recollection on this point with other participants at meeting].
23. The Taoiseach summed up that we were in agreement that we would prepare an agenda on decommissioning issues and the talks process. Mr. Adams said that this

should not appear in the newspapers. The Taoiseach said that our line could be that the Government were seeking proactively to overcome the differences between the British Government and Sinn Féin. He had already stated publicly that there was evidence of movement on both sides. Mr. Adams commented that this kind of line begged questions from the media.

22. The Taoiseach had to leave at this point for another engagement. The meeting continued for a short while. Mr. Doherty raised a number of issues relating to prisoners. He noted that the conditions of prisoners in Britain were worsening and asked in this context when the Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons would be in place. He also enquired as to the prospects for further prisoner releases from Portlaoise and the question of parole for lifers. The Tánaiste said that we would get back to Sinn Féin on the first two points and Mr. O'hUiginn indicated that progress was being made on the parole question.

S. Hare