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SECRET

Government Presentation to the International Body, 18 December 1995

1. The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Justice met with Senator George Mitchell (Chairman), Mr. Harri Holkeri and General John de Chastelain of the International Body at Iveagh House on Monday, 18 December 1995. The meeting began at 10.20 am and continued for about two hours. The members of the Body had previously been supplied with copies of the written Government submission dated 18 December 1995.
2. The Tánaiste and the Minister for Justice were accompanied by the Secretary McKernan, Secretary Dalton, Secretary Ó hUiginn, Fergus Finlay, Paul Hickey and the undersigned. Aides to the members of the Body in attendance were Martha Pope (Mitchell), David Pezorski (Mitchell), Timo Kantola (Holkeri) and David Angel (de Chastelain).
3. The Tánaiste welcomed the members of the Body and thanked them for taking on the task entrusted to them. He noted that the Northern Ireland problem is the only remaining conflict situation within the EU and the hope now was that we could bring it to an end. The Tánaiste referred to the written Government submission and spoke to the speaking notes attached at Annex 1. In addition to the points addressed in these, he spoke of the high level of North-South security co-operation. He also emphasised that the cessation of violence had been a major step for those involved in taking that decision.
4. The Minister for Justice then addressed the issues in the speaking notes attached at Annex 2. In response to a query from Senator Mitchell she confirmed that the Garda assessment of current arms holdings is a shared one with the RUC. In addition to the points addressed in the speaking notes, the Minister spoke of the importance which the Government attach to securing the peace and detailed the approach taken to the release of Republican prisoners. The Minister added that the British Government had not considered the role of the prisoners in the cessation in quite the same way although she hoped that there would be movement on this. The Minister mentioned a number of the readily available materials from which explosive devices can be improvised. She concluded her introductory remarks by emphasising that the work "trust" ran through the Government's submission and that, as stated therein, decommissioning is an element of the political process, not a substitute for it.
5. Senator Mitchell began by stressing ~~the~~ the confidential approach being taken by the Body. They would make no comment of substance on any submission or offer any view on the approach of the parties in advance of their report. They would return to Ireland in the first half of January and "hoped to comply with the time frame within the Communiqué". He added, however, that "mid-January is slightly imprecise" and

there was some flexibility. It was likely that the Body would want to talk to the Government again. A list of the organisations it was meeting would be made public.

6. Mr. Holkeri said that he agreed that decommissioning is a political issue. But the margin the Body has been given is very limited. He asked if our side had any idea of how simultaneously to present views on decommissioning and to "say something" about the political track. He added that the two issues could not be separated. The Tánaiste responding, recalled the origins of the twin track process. He said that following the cessation a succession of obstacles in the way of further progress had appeared. These included the issue of permanency, the delay in meeting with Sinn Féin and the demand for some arms decommissioning. Even the word "decommissioning" had to be contrived in an effort to create the necessary flexibility for overcoming obstacles to political progress. Mr. Holkeri was correct in assuming that the tracks could not be separated. The Tánaiste referred to the principles outlined in the Government's submission. He suggested that some people were failing to recognise the significance of the sixteen month long cessation of violence. The Sinn Féin leadership had taken a big risk. If they and others could be brought to subscribe to the principles in the Government's submission matters would be brought a long way forward.
7. The Minister for Justice added that the members of the Body would in the course of considering the submissions from all parties get a very strong sense of the political overlay to the decommissioning issue. It would be helpful if the Body began its report with the historical background to the issue. Holkeri remarked that it would not be easy to produce an account acceptable to all. Mitchell said that there was an account of decommissioning in the Joint Communiqué, "but the authors don't agree on it!"
8. Holkeri said that "it seems that every step in both tracks is a precondition". The Tánaiste pointed out that there is a crossover between the tracks - they are interlinked and a final settlement would not be achieved unless people were assured that the violence was over. He emphasised that the Government want decommissioning and had spent more per capita on security over the past twenty five years than the UK.
9. In his first intervention, General de Chastelain said that the "modalities are fairly simple". Decommissioning could be achieved fairly quickly provided that the legal arrangements were in place, including understandings on the forensic aspect. He said that Gerry Adams had made the same point at the Body's meeting with Sinn Féin immediately before the present meeting. However, it would be difficult to get assurances from the IRA that they were satisfied with particular modalities and Adams had opened by stating that he was not speaking for the IRA. de Chastelain added that the Body had indications that there are people ready to speak for the loyalist paramilitaries.
10. de Chastelain asked if "you as a nation wish to see the arms destroyed with third party involvement". The Minister for Justice responded that there are a broad range of

options which had been exercised elsewhere, including letting weapons rot in the ground. However, these other experiences were not necessarily relevant. The Garda briefing to follow after the present meeting could also address this issue. The Tánaiste emphasised that the IRA will never surrender their arms to the British Government. What the Government wanted was to ensure confidence in a new era of democratic politics. de Chastelain said that he did not believe arms did "rot in the ground".

11. Mitchell said that they wanted to get to the essential point on which success would depend. One side sought a prior handover of guns as a tangible gesture of a commitment to exclusively democratic methods. The other side said no to this. If that situation persisted the cease-fire is doomed. Referring to his judicial experience, he said that it had involved picking a winner and a loser in each case. However, the Body has been cautioned against any such approach because it would doom the peace process. The question then was what could the Body do? Some had suggested to them that they should reach a conclusion in which both sides were asked to do something. A "religious" person to whom they had spoken in Belfast had said that the Body would have to make it a "win, win" situation in their report.
12. Mitchell remarked that the Government had presented "a very impressive and persuasive submission". Pages 21 and 22 were "very useful" and "kept me awake last night". However, he felt that if these pages were incorporated in the Body's report the potential result might be that people would say this is the Sinn Féin position of no preconditions. Mitchell asked what the principles outlined in these pages asked Sinn Féin to do "so that there would be a mutuality of accommodation". He asked if the Government could give the Body something along these lines now or over the next few weeks.
13. The Tánaiste pointed out that the Government are asking Sinn Féin to do something - the element envisaged in paragraph 6.12 (8) of the submission would involve the strongest commitment yet by them. If Sinn Féin signed up to all that was in paragraph 6.12 it would involve very significant movement by them. Mitchell asked the Tánaiste to tell him what in the eight points of paragraph 6.12 Sinn Féin had not signed up to. The Tánaiste responded that they clearly had not yet agreed to 6.12.(8) and Mitchell observed: "that is phased decommissioning during all-party talks". de Chastelain enquired if the Sinn Féin had been asked to agree to this and the Tánaiste assured him that he had put this to them and urged them to get on to the fast lane of the process. However, Sinn Féin had not been able to persuade the IRA yet. Nor was it clear that the British and the Unionists would accept the approach in question as a way forward.
14. In response to Mitchell's query as to what was new in the other seven points of paragraph 6.12, Secretary Ó hUiginn said that they were all points towards which Sinn Féin had moved "but were not yet in the ball park". He suggested that it was not a question of the Body finding a half way house to be successful. Rather the need was to transcend the obstacle represented by the decommissioning issue. The British view

of decommissioning as expressed in the Washington Three formula was in a certain sense morally consistent: if the violence was due to wicked people, all they had to do was to stop. But on the Irish side there was a very strong sense that unfortunately violence is rooted in history. The power of the Republican movement was rooted in the residual power of myth. The whole purpose of the peace process was to tackle this issue at the level of doctrine on the basis that the British would take a neutral approach. Gradually the frontier of Sinn Féin ideology was being brought forward so that they were now well advanced into constitutional politics. But on all of the points addressed in paragraph 6.12 there remained subtle ways in which they had not gone the full way, and a change in that respect would be significant.

15. Mitchell noted that the Body had been "told repeatedly" at its meetings in the North that Sinn Féin have not signed up to the consent principle. He asked if adherence to the principles in the Government's submission would involve this. The Minister for Justice and others pointed to paragraph 6.12 (5) as meeting this point.
16. Secretary Dalton stressed that the Government's submission was drafted carefully to avoid establishing a "new set of hooks". The Government were trying to indicate a set of principles to evoke some kind of a positive response. Even if some of these principles had been laid down before, the effect of their being presented by the Body could be significant. The British know that they will not get prior decommissioning and endorsement of the principles by the Body might get them off the hook especially if the political track was progressing.
17. The Tánaiste urged the Body not to underestimate the strength of its position to evoke positive commitments from Gerry Adams and the like which would go beyond even what had already been conveyed to the Taoiseach. He also emphasised the potential of the principle in paragraph 6.12 (3) in terms of commitments to be made by Sinn Féin and said that they could deliver on ending punishment beatings. The Tánaiste made clear the Government's abhorrence of the beatings.
18. The Minister for Justice reiterated the value of the Body setting down principles which had been already been put forward. The context was vital and both Sinn Féin and the Unionists were using language now which they would not have done two years ago. This developing sense of trust should be built upon. The Tánaiste said that even though he had received a negative reply to his invitation to Trimble for talks, discussion was continuing in private on arranging a meeting. It was important to realise that leaders had to hold their own followers while seeking to make advances. IRA statements should be seen in the same way.
19. Mitchell said that the British view is that the precondition of decommissioning had always been part of the peace process. The Sinn Féin view is that if they had been told about this precondition there would have been no ceasefire. Mitchell added that the Body had met with Albert Reynolds TD the previous evening and he referred to the former Taoiseach's letter published in the *Irish Times* on 9 December. He said that he assumed that the Irish Government's view was different from the British one and

asked the Tánaiste if he was correct in saying that our view is that a precondition on decommissioning was not part of the discussions before the cease-fires.

20. The Tánaiste responded that the reality was if there had been talk of a surrender of arms there would have been no ceasefire. There was certainly no mention of "decommissioning" in his recollection. He had been with Albert Reynolds five minutes before the cease-fire announcement under the name of P. O'Neill. The former Taoiseach had been talking on the phone to John Major and it was clear that the British Prime Minister did not even then believe that a ceasefire was on. The Tánaiste said that in all the contacts of the previous three to six months Albert Reynolds and himself had made clear that the Irish Government was not interested in a temporary ceasefire - they wanted one that was permanent as the outcome to work that had gone on for four years previously. Senator Mitchell could confirm with Bruce Morrison that on the latter's last visit three months before the ceasefire, a three month cessation was still apparently all that was on offer. But a permanent one had been achieved. The only reference to arms had been along the lines that it was one of a number of issues, such as prisoners and policing, which would have to be addressed after the cessation.
21. Mitchell said that the Tánaiste would know that the British cite his statements on decommissioning and asked if his position was one prior to the ceasefire. The Tánaiste responded that any Government would wish to see decommissioning and that successive Irish Governments have said the same over many years. But the situation had been changed completely by the achievement of a permanent cessation of violence. The Minister for Justice said that this had created a new context. The same had occurred in South Africa and it was necessary to work on the situation on a day-to-day basis. The art of politics was to move on.
22. Mitchell remarked that the "more you reiterate in politics, the more you dig in". He asked if the British can move now on decommissioning? The Tánaiste responded that the straight answer was that they could if the Unionists move. In further response to Mitchell's query on Trimble's attitude, the Tánaiste said that he did not know if the Unionist leader is willing to move. Trimble has to look over his left shoulder (Mitchell suggested that it was his right shoulder!). However, he is in quite a unique position if he has the courage to move forward. If he does not move he may end up with a bigger problem. The real issue was not to get on further hooks - the British had done this with Washington Three.
23. The Minister for Justice suggested that the Assembly idea was another potential hook which had been handled by being put in the political track. Mitchell responded that "you have to consider the possibility that Trimble's position may be difficult. He is quite clear that he wants the Assembly as a forum for discussion. I've met him ten times...the Assembly is beyond our (the Body's) area... but every time it's his main concern. It is a mistake to assume that he would be ready to start all-party talks." Secretary Dalton observed that our side had taken some comfort from Trimble's apparent willingness at times to consider alternatives to prior decommissioning.

However, Mitchell insisted: "No - we didn't get that". Mitchell added that the Body members understood that they were getting hard positions in these first submissions (Trimble's were both oral and written) but he again stressed that the UUP leader "is strong on the precondition of decommissioning. Given the history of the issue of decommissioning, Mitchell expressed the view that a "mere verbal statement would not be enough". He said in relation to Trimble's position: "Believe me it's no longer a gesture. It is quite clearly a substantial decommissioning as part of a process of decommissioning".

24. Secretary Ó hUiginn pointed out that Trimble represents a community that is the incumbent in terms of the political structure in Northern Ireland. They have the Union and almost any reform will be unpopular with them. Nationalists there feared that Trimble has a strong interest in not moving at all. We must look, therefore, to some extent to the attitude of the British Government to alter the equation.
25. Secretary Ó hUiginn described Sinn Féin/IRA as a pantomime horse - there was a degree of cross-membership between the two. The great tragedy of the decommissioning debate was that it had shifted the focus to the military side of the Republican movement. It would be well worth testing the potential for progressive decommissioning with Sinn Féin but not in a way that makes it another hook. The leaders of Unionism were important but the unionist people would take a poor view of an approach which suggested that the ceasefire could be sacrificed through insisting on decommissioning. It would be very valuable if the Body could establish exactly what the Unionist leadership really want on decommissioning. Clarity of definition on this point would prevent a kind of rolling precondition.
26. The Minister for Justice urged the Body not to be too pessimistic on the attitude of the Unionists and not to underestimate the changes in their attitude that might be possible after it reported. Holkeri asked if Paisley is the key. The Tánaiste responded that it is extremely unlikely that Paisley will stay away for long if Trimble and others move. He added that he had discussed the Assembly idea with Trimble and the latter's thinking was confused on this issue. The Tánaiste pointed to the dangers of the Assembly idea and said that it had to be understood that the days of Stormont were over and that there is not going to be an internal settlement. He questioned the need for an election to choose people to talk to each other and pointed to the provocative nature of the Assembly as presently envisaged for nationalists. The Tánaiste added that there was no difficulty with Trimble putting his ideas forward in the political track. Mitchell again emphasised his view that Trimble is wedded to the Assembly saying: "I don't think you should underestimate the conviction he has on it."
27. de Chastelain asked if the fact that the UUP "power base is in areas not affected by the violence" encourages them to see Washington Three as a "must". Secretary Ó hUiginn agreed that there was an attitude which amounted to simply "the IRA should stop and surrender their arms". However, one of the problems of elections was that the internal framework was presupposed and a 60/40 unionist/nationalist split was predictable. There was a kind of evolution in Unionism which should be encouraged.

The ceasefire was not like a light switch to be turned on and off. It must be sustained dynamically. Sinn Féin/IRA no longer expected a United Ireland but did expect a level playing field in Northern Ireland. They did want to - and would be able - to sustain the cease-fire if they were not humiliated by a total lack of political movement. Secretary Ó hUiginn pointed to the very large long-term stake for all the people of Ireland in consolidating this position. Secretary Dalton suggested that the Body consider a descending order of possibilities from a return to violence, a stalemate to the best result of a set of principles which would keep both sides at the table.

28. Mitchell felt that "if you are agree a set of principles with no more specificity than that (the principles in paragraph 6.12 of the Government submission) you are laying the ground for a replay of the decommissioning problem at another stage...". He indicated "a slight disagreement" with Secretary Ó hUiginn on the question of whether it was necessary to seek a middle ground between the parties in terms of the Body's report rather than to transcend the core issue. Mitchell asked the Government to consider the following two practical proposals which had been put to the Body:

- Within 60 days of the opening of all-party talks an inventory of arms would be produced by all paramilitaries;
- Within a fixed period of time after the opening of all-party talks that certain defined offensive weapons would be destroyed or dealt with otherwise. These weapons could include e.g. semtex, missiles, mortars etc..

Practical action on either or both of these lines would, Mitchell suggested, demonstrate sincerity and possibly meet the needs of the other side "who would not be getting the precondition they want". Mitchell asked that the Government give some thought to these proposals with a view to giving specificity to paragraph 6.12 of the submission. He also asked that we "take the next step to 6.12 (7) and consider the nature of the step, the position in the sequence and the timing." He appeared to envisage a progressive decommissioning following on an inventory and/or a first instalment of offensive weapons.

29. Secretary Dalton asked if an inventory would be given to the Governments or to the Body. Mitchell felt the key issue was that it be verifiable. One suggestion that had been made to the Body was that the IRA give an inventory to the Irish Government and the Loyalist paramilitaries to the British Government. Alternatively it had been suggested that both could deliver an inventory (and offensive weapons?) to a third party e.g. the Body but not, he added the UN. Mitchell went on to ask the Government to comment on how the mechanisms of decommissioning should work. He again asked that our side consider the extent to which 6.12 could be expanded and repeated the view that "more precision is likely to get acceptance on the side that is not getting the decommissioning precondition".
30. The Tánaiste said that there could be some dangers with the practical measures being

suggested by Senator Mitchell. Had the Body asked Sinn Féin about them? Mitchell recalled that de Chastelain had already mentioned that Adams had made clear at the outset of the earlier meeting that Sinn Féin were not speaking authoritatively for the IRA. He referred to his U.S. Senate experience of skilful witnesses and said that the meeting with Sinn Féin had involved "long answers to very few questions". The Tánaiste remarked that the Body should not underestimate the people Sinn Féin have to convince. While we could engage in straight line thinking this was inappropriate to the situation in question.

31. de Chastelain responded to this point by saying that he had been "struck by Sinn Féin's desire to be accepted for themselves and not to be de-sanitised". Getting to all-party talks was the main point for them. The impression he had from Adams is that "his main difficulty with the IRA is that sixteen months later he's still not at the table". de Chastelain remarked that Adams' "neck is on the line". He referred to the slogans on walls in Belfast referring to Michael Collins.
32. As the meeting drew to a close members of the Body agreed with the Tánaiste and the Minister for Justice about the positive atmosphere on the ground in the North and the widespread desire that the peace hold. Secretary Ó hUiginn suggested that it would be useful if the Body asked the security forces on both sides what their view is of the possibility of an inventory or decommissioning of offensive weapons being delivered by the IRA (it was noted a number of times during the meeting that the Body was subsequently to receive a Garda briefing).
33. In concluding remarks, Mitchell emphasised that there was no question of decisions having been taken already by the Body. None of the questions which they had put to the Government should be taken to imply this. He added that it would be dismaying to the members of the Body if anything of their discussions with the Government was made public. He referred to a comment made to him (in Belfast?) to the effect that "it is common knowledge in Dublin that you are Washington's man and you're going to deliver". He would not want such views confirmed. The Tánaiste assured Senator Mitchell that the Government would fully respect the confidentiality of the Body's work and continue to extend its fullest co-operation.



Colm Ó Floinn
19 December 1995

cc PST, PSS, Secretary Ó hUiginn
Counsellors AI
Mr. McIntyre
Messrs. Murray, Teahon, Donlon, Dalton
Joint Secretary and Ambassadors, Washington, London, Helsinki and Ottawa (by bag with submission)

ANNEX 1

Government Presentation to the International Body
18 December 1995
Speaking Points for the Tánaiste

Introductory

Senator Mitchell (Mr. Chairman) - Mr. Holkeri and General De Chastelain.

- I would wish at the outset to express the thanks of the Government and people of Ireland for your willingness to take on this extremely important task at short notice and with a tight reporting deadline.

- You have been asked by the Governments of Ireland and of the United Kingdom to provide your own assessment at a time of historic opportunity.

- I know that you each bear a heavy burden in your own country and we appreciate your participation in the International Body all the more for that.

- You bring an impressive array of political, diplomatic and peacekeeping skills to serve the cause of peace in Northern Ireland and throughout these islands.

- We are also grateful to the Governments of the United States, Finland and Canada for supporting the work of the Body - I have put our thanks to your Governments on the record of Dáil Éireann, the Irish Parliament.

Government's Approach to the Northern Ireland Problem and Decommissioning

- The Irish Government is presenting you with a written submission this morning which I hope will be of assistance to you in the independent discharge of your mandate.

 - I would like to speak about some of the issues we address in this submission.

 - I want to make absolutely clear that the Government of Ireland seeks the total decommissioning of all illegal arms in this State and in Northern Ireland.

 - Successive Irish Governments have sought to resolve the problem of Northern Ireland by exclusively peaceful and democratic means

 - We are convinced that this approach is now shared by parties who have influence with those who are in possession of illegal arms.

 - Irish Governments have regarded the process of Anglo-Irish co-operation as essential to a resolution of the Northern Ireland problem.

 - This process has most recently resulted in the Joint Communiqué establishing the International Body as part of the twin track process.

 - Anglo-Irish co-operation includes full security co-operation between the two States in countering those who possess illegal arms.

 - This co-operation is ongoing and the Irish Security Forces continue unremittingly their efforts to detect and seize such arms.
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Decommissioning is not a guarantee of Peace

- In the lead up to the cessation of violence last year the Irish Government sought to do everything in its power to ensure that it would be total and permanent.

 - We believe that this objective was achieved following the statements by the IRA and the loyalist groups of August and October 1994.

 - Many other important issues such as decommissioning of arms and the situation of prisoners remained to be addressed after the cessation.

 - The Irish Government's view is that all of these issues should be approached in a manner which will reinforce the fundamental gain of the cessation of violence.

 - We would wish to see full decommissioning of arms as soon as possible but we recognise that even if this were possible immediately it would not guarantee permanent peace.

 - Those who currently hold unauthorised arms could easily secure fresh supplies on the international market and they are skilled in improvising explosive devices from a variety of materials.

 - The only guarantee that the peace process is irreversible will be the success of the all-party negotiations which the two Governments are committed to launch by the end of February 1996.
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Position of the Paramilitaries

- The paramilitary groups who hold illegal arms, in particular the IRA, see themselves as the heirs of a long tradition, which in their eyes, includes a legitimate recourse to physical force.

- They accept in broad principle that arms will need to be decommissioned, but the circumstances in which this takes place is crucial for them.

- (I need hardly stress that I refer to their own subjective view, which has always been emphatically rejected by all Irish Governments and the great majority of the nationalist tradition.)

- In spite of our best efforts to persuade them, they have made it clear that they cannot accept decommissioning as a pre-condition for entry to all-party negotiations.

- Any connotation of "surrendering" arms - is strongly rejected by them, and they see a handover prior to substantive political engagement as tantamount to surrender.

- The Irish Government accepts that the paramilitary leadership which agreed to cease violence last year cannot now deliver decommissioning of arms in advance of all-party negotiations, without starting a dangerous internal debate which might destabilise the ceasefire.

- In this respect there is a difference of view between the two Governments.

- The Irish Government believes that an unchanging insistence on the so-called "Washington Three" requirement put forward by the British Government will in fact defeat two basic aims which both Governments share - to launch all-party negotiations and have all arms decommissioned.

- It is important to remember that, despite the best efforts of the security forces throughout these islands, a significant quantity of illegal arms remains in paramilitary hands.
 - The decommissioning of these arms will have to be voluntary and we are convinced that the necessary conditions for it can be achieved only through the political process.
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Role of the International Body

- Whatever the difference between the two Governments on the possible timing of decommissioning, I think that it is worth emphasising that the establishment of the Body represents a shared willingness on both our parts to consider carefully an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue.
- You have been given a wide-ranging mandate in one of the two tracks established by the Joint Communiqué of 28 November 1995.
- There is a dynamic relationship between these tracks, so that a successful outcome to your deliberations could have a major and positive impact on the political talks among the parties.
- I would emphasise again that you have been asked by the two Governments for an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue.
- To arrive at such an assessment it will be crucially important that you hear all viewpoints, and draw your own independent conclusions on the whole issue.
- An important part of your work is certainly to consider a practical method for decommissioning and some valuable work already done in this area is referred to in our submission.

- I know that my colleague the Minister for Justice will wish to address this in a few moments.

- But a purely technical or legal study of decommissioning would serve little useful purpose, unless your work can advance the conditions where decommissioning can become a reality.

- The core of your task is to advise the two Governments on the creation of a context which would make decommissioning achievable in practice.

- In this sense decommissioning is an essentially political question.

- In the words of the Joint Communiqué you have been asked to report on the arrangements necessary for the removal from the political equation of arms silenced by virtue of the welcome decisions taken last Summer and Autumn by those organisations that previously supported the use of arms for political purposes.

- The Irish Government believes that if the report of the International Body can offer reassurance on the commitment of all relevant parties to peaceful and democratic methods, then the prospects for total decommissioning and an agreed political settlement will be significantly enhanced.

- I would urge you to take account of the significant commitments in this regard that have already been made by the parties who have influence with those in possession of illegal arms.

- In relation to any practical proposals which the Body might bring forward and which would advance the prospects for all-party negotiations, I would assure you that the Irish Government will be as flexible as possible subject to the duty to protect public safety.

A Possible Way Forward

- As I have indicated, the Irish Government believes strongly that the International Body should form its own objective judgement, taking account of all the views which it will receive.

- We believe that there are measures which could be taken by others which would enhance the prospects for progress on the issue before you.

- The two Governments reaffirmed their willingness in the Joint Communiqué to continue to take responsive measures as the threat reduces.

- The goal of normal civilian policing in Northern Ireland and the very high level of licensed gun-holding are among the issues which will need to be addressed.

- The paramilitaries could boost confidence and trust by ending any recruitment or involvement in punishment beatings and targetting of individuals.

- We are convinced that the International Body can best serve the cause of peace by identifying a basis on which the decommissioning issue could be progressed while all parties moved at the same time to full and substantive negotiations.

- The Body will doubtless come up with its own ideas and I hope your deliberations will create their own positive dynamic.

- The Irish Government would suggest that you may wish to consider asking the relevant parties to subscribe to a series of principles centred on a recognition of the significance of the cessation of violence and a total and permanent commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic means of pursuing political ends.

- We have detailed some such principles in our submission.
 - We have also suggested some practical elements which the International Body might envisage for advancing the decommissioning of illegally held arms, on the basis of these principles.
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Concluding Remarks by the Tánaiste

- I have sought to outline the main themes addressed in the Government's paper and the fundamentally political dimension to your work for peace.
- The Irish Government is convinced that decommissioning is achievable and at an early date if all the parties are ready to work for an overall political accommodation.
- Your work in the International Body over the next four weeks offers the hope of creating the space, confidence and trust which will be crucial to success in that endeavour.
- I need hardly stress that all our resources are at your disposal for any assistance you may need in your valuable work
- I know that my colleague the Minister for Justice, Nora Owen TD, would now like to address some of the security and technical issues which are of direct concern to her in this State and in our relations with the British authorities.

(Minister for Justice: Separate speaking notes being prepared in the Department of Justice)

INTERNATIONAL BODY

Speaking Note for the Minister for Justice

Introductory

- I would like to add a few words to what the Tanaiste has said.
- First, I want to join with him in expressing the Government's appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, and to Mr. Holkeri and General de Chastelain for your readiness to assist both Governments in seeking a solution to a most difficult issue.
- As the Tanaiste has said, the Government's submission addresses some additional matters over and above those to which he has referred and I would like first to deal with them briefly.

Historical experience

- One is our experience with arms amnesties in 1962 and 1972 which will be of interest to you. They were not without some success but you should not assume that the arms recovered then were exclusively - or even substantially - drawn from the IRA's arsenal of the time.

Dalton/Chilcot Group

- The second matter dealt with is the work undertaken on the decommissioning issue by a group of Irish and British officials known as the Dalton Chilcot Group, which was chaired jointly by the Secretary of my Department and the Permanent Secretary of the NIO.

- That Group presented an agreed report to the Taoiseach and British Prime Minister on a possible framework for the decommissioning of terrorist arms and we are making a copy of that report available to you on a confidential basis as it is relevant to your terms of reference. You may have received a copy already from the British side.

- A close reading of the report will show that it was careful to avoid making movement on decommissioning - and still less actual decommissioning - a precondition for political progress. Moreover the report recognised that peace could only be ^{or} _^guanteed by progress towards a comprehensive political solution.

- It did, however, set out a framework for decommissioning which was intended to inform discussions with the relevant parties and which addressed the sort of issues which it was anticipated would arise such as methods, the use of intermediaries, and legal questions.

- I should also stress, however, that that framework itself was intended to be flexible and no hard positions were adopted on the various issues considered as it was equally recognised that the "voluntary" nature of what was being sought would of necessity mean that account would have to be taken of the preferences of those whose engagement was sought.

- The voluntary nature of decommissioning is a point worth stressing. If the security forces knew where the arms were, they would have decommissioned them long ago. What you are now exploring is the issue of voluntary decommissioning by paramilitary organisations.

Current Arms Holdings etc.

- The Government's submission also adverts to the nature and extent of the arms held by paramilitary organisations and their capacity to manufacture and acquire arms. Those holdings are significant but perhaps not as great as some imagine.

- The Garda Commissioner will provide you later today with a more detailed police assessment on this issue and will also deal with the capacity of groups such as the Provisional IRA in particular. I hardly need to say that the information which the Commissioner will provide will be confidential of its nature and that we do not, for obvious reasons, disclose security force assessments of arms holding publicly.

- That, I believe, now covers the matters dealt with in the Government's submission.

General Points on Government Position

- On a more general note, I would, with your permission, Mr. Chairman, like to add to what the Tanaiste has said about the issue of decommissioning.
- The issue is of great importance and special interest to me given my responsibilities as Minister for Justice. We would all like to see full decommissioning now.
- But, as the Tanaiste has said, the Government has reluctantly come to the conclusion that decommissioning is not possible at this stage of the Peace Process.
- We value peace greatly. It is that consideration - more than any other - which has led us to the conclusion that to insist on decommissioning as a precondition for entry into all party negotiations is the wrong course.
- We believe that to be the wrong course because our assessment is that the paramilitary leaderships cannot deliver decommissioning at this stage and that to insist on it - or even to insist on a start being made now to actual decommissioning - could endanger the peace. We are reinforced in that view by recognition of the

fact that full decommissioning of arms cannot, of itself, guarantee peace and that even full decommissioning would not be decisive in preventing a future terrorist campaign.

- We do, however, believe that decommissioning is achievable in the longer term and that the report you make can be crucially important in both sustaining the Peace Process and in bringing us closer to that objective.

Your report will have to strike the right note and we fully recognise that that will be no easy task. We think the right note would be one which left its readers with grounds for increased confidence that violence is at an end and which allowed all parties to proceed to the negotiating table without preconditions.

- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your attention.