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Meeting between the Taoiseach and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Dr Mo Mowlam, Taoiseach's office, Government Buildings, 9.30-10.00am, Thursday, 5 February, 1998

1. The meeting commenced with a tête-a-tête between the Taoiseach and the Secretary of State lasting about 8 months. They were then joined by the British Ambassador and Mr James Tansley of the British Embassy and by Dr Martin Mansergh and the undersigned. There were some opening jocular exchanges about the debate at the Law Society in Trinity College, Dublin on Tuesday, 3 February, in which the Taoiseach had participated and which the Ambassador had attended. The substantive discussion which followed is reported here in direct speech but the report is not verbatim and not exhaustive.
2. Secretary of State
We have talking about how we go forward in the months ahead. I have been trying to get action on my side, such as putting in place the referendum legislation, looking at the campaign to be mounted. That will take three weeks and it will take three weeks to get through the legislation, making 1½ months. On that basis, we have to get the agreement by the end of next month at the latest. So there is a lot of work to be done.
3. Taoiseach
I agree. We have the Propositions document. We have your document on Strand 1. We have the joint papers on Strands 2 and 3. We need to work up these documents, as confidentially as we can. I know the dangers if a single text were to leak out but we need to move things forward.
4. Secretary of State
Rather than have a single document, we should keep it in segments and there should be no memos to anybody. We must be sure that it will not get out and this should not even be reported back through our systems.
5. Taoiseach
We will keep the drafting of it very tight on our side.
6. Secretary of State
This week at the talks was good. Work was done on a lot of detail on Strand 1. We had a discussion of the Sinn Féin proposal for Regional

Councils. There was an improvement in regard to engagement. Empey eyeballed Sinn Féin and felt he was winning. You could see him visibly growing in confidence.

7. Taoiseach

Both Sinn Féin and the IRA have non-recognition of any Assembly in Northern Ireland in their Constitution and they need a 75% majority to bring out a change in that position. They could not get this at any early stage.

8. Secretary of State

We must keep parking in Strand 1.

9. Dr Mansergh

An Assembly can only be agreed at the end of the negotiations, by Sinn Féin.

10. Secretary of State

As regards Strand 2, the argument is there that how do you get people to put on a North-South Body, without an Assembly. If we work on through Strand 2, then Sinn Féin could present the Assembly as a way to get what may be attainable in Strand 2.

11. Dr Mansergh

They don't want to agree to an Assembly or to a definitive statement of the principle of consent until the end.

12. Secretary of State

Or they may not even fully agree even then, just acquiesce. If they go no further than the latter, so what?

13. Dr Mansergh

We need to avoid putting them in a corner by pushing them to sign up to things too early.

14. Secretary of State

They have to find ways to discuss Strand 1 matters, such as an Assembly, while not agreeing to them at this stage.

There followed some account of proceedings at the seminar in Salzburg attended by Dr Mansergh and by representatives of various parties.

15. Taoiseach
Sinn Féin have their Árd-Fheis in April. They are getting a lot of heavy flak from their grass-roots, as was evident at meetings they convened recently in London, Dublin and elsewhere. I wonder can they sign up to anything before that Árd-Fheis is out of the way.
16. Secretary of State
I shall try to push our machine but we should keep the paper in segments. We should also put as much as possible of the paper's content into the talks, so that the parties can take ownership of the various elements. Then Sinn Féin might acquiesce but possibly campaign in favour, on the basis that the agreement was a transitional step towards their ultimate goals.
17. Dr Mansergh
They could equally well campaign against.
18. Secretary of State
That would not be so bad, if they confirmed any campaign against to democratic means.
19. Dr Mansergh
It is hard to know what way they'll go.
20. Taoiseach
I think they may want to dodge their Árd-Fheis.
21. Secretary of State
Shall we try, some time soon, perhaps when we are here on the 16th, to get dates? We should get our machines to check dates. Mark Durkan had a wonderful phrase the other day: that we are in the age of the hologram, that the agreement will be like a hologram where one hopes everybody will see their own version of the agreement in it. The two of us should sit down to see how we can best handle matters over the period ahead.
22. Taoiseach
At my Parliamentary Questions yesterday, all the supplementaries being put to me related to technical matters, like who was going to be the Accounting Officer for the North-South Body, would it have its own

civil servants and the like. It was unreal, when we are trying to put together the bones of the institutional arrangements.

23. Dr Mansergh
Our problems are in the constitutional area. Bobby Ballagh was writing in the papers again yesterday.
24. Ambassador Sutherland
Some people (here) have a very fundamentalist approach to constitutional matters.
25. Dr Mansergh
Yes.
26. Ambassador Sutherland (reverting to the dates issue)
We need to look at a critical path for the negotiations and their outcome.
27. Dr Mansergh
It emerged from interaction with Donaldson in Salzburg that the unionists don't have worries about the concept of North-South functional bodies. Their concern is essentially with the extent of the area these bodies would cover.
28. Mr Kirwan
It may be more than that. In a discussion I had with Empey in Belfast last Friday night, it emerged that while being less concerned about the functional bodies, they are concerned about the Ministerial Council, that it should not be possible to see it as an embryo all-Ireland Government.
29. Taoiseach
We need to work with care and deliberation. I do not want any repetition of the negotiation of the Propositions document, at a weekend, over the phone. These matters are too serious and important. It is too dangerous to deal with them in a big hurry.
- We should try, between ourselves, to get to a single document, perhaps with square brackets.
30. Secretary of State
Yes, subject to the rider that we should also look at the process, what we need to do as regards that. I am going to the House for legislative time

for the referendum legislation: that will make people realise we are serious. We also need to put stuff into the talks.

But neither of us should give texts to people, so nobody can say, we got the piece of paper and others did not, as Trimble loves to do. You should not give them to the SDLP or the Shinners and we should not give them to the Unionists.

31. Dr Mansergh

There would have to be one exception to that: we need to consult people on our ideas about amendments to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution here.

32. Secretary of State

Consultation is OK, so long as we don't give people texts. It would be helpful to consult Seamus (Mallon).

What about the issue of going to another location, apart from Dublin and London? I was proposing Barbados.

33. Taoiseach

We shall have to see. That would only arise at the end.

The meeting concluded at this point. Leaving the room, Ms Mowlam suggested that the Taoiseach might try to do or say something when the Unionists came to Dublin that would be helpful to Trimble in the context of their nervousness about coming here. The Taoiseach said he would say something helpful. The Taoiseach and Secretary of State then went down and spoke to and responded to questions from the press. A separate transcript of the exchanges will be available.



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Department of the Taoiseach
5 February, 1998