

**SUMMARY RECORD OF PLENARY SESSION -
TUESDAY 17 FEBRUARY 1998 (1510) - DUBLIN CASTLE**

Those present:

INDEPENDENT CHAIRMEN	GOVERNMENT TEAMS	PARTIES
Senator Mitchell	British Government	Alliance
Mr Holkeri	Irish Government	Labour
General de Chastelain		Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
		Progressive Unionist Party
		Sinn Féin
		Social Democratic & Labour Party
		Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman called the Plenary to order at 3.10pm. He asked Sinn Fein to report on progress they have made since the adjournment at 2.24pm. Sinn Fein thanked the Chairman but indicated that they were still having problems of a practical nature. They were still waiting advice from senior Counsel. They explain that they had been told originally that they could expect this advice some time between 6 and 7pm but would inform the Chairmen immediately if it was forthcoming sooner. They also explained that they had had considerable difficulty with the timing of events - they had been notified of an indictment against them yesterday which gave them no time to put together a political rebuttal and seek legal advice. They made the point to emphasise that any party in their position would be facing similar problems. They shared other participants frustrations but asked the

Chairman to consider adjourning the Plenary until 7pm with the undertaking that they would come back to him sooner if possible. The Chairman responded by confirming that Sinn Fein were seeking an adjournment to not later than 7pm. Sinn Fein replied that they were seeking an adjournment on the call of the Chair but had set out their reasons to enable the Chairman to come to an informed judgement.

2. The Alliance raised a point about procedure. They explained that when the Plenary had convened at 2pm the Chairman had outlined the order of proceedings. They explained that they were keen to draw the Chairman's attention to the view that they had expressed the previous day and the two particular grounds on which they had expressed that view. They had asked for an opportunity to state their position again today, either in writing or verbally. They had no desire to quarrel with the Chairman on how he wanted to take proceedings forward but wanted to register again their offer. The Chairman replied by asking Alliance if they had copies of their statement made the day previous. Alliance indicated that they had and the Chairman asked if they would circulate them to other participants.

3. The Chairman thanked Sinn Fein for their statement clarifying the position. He explained that it was his responsibility to come to a fair and reasonable decision, taking into account the necessity of taking the process forward without unnecessary delay. It seemed to him that under the circumstances he could grant an adjournment until 5pm. The Chairman further explained that the Plenary would remain in session from 5pm to 8pm or until proceedings were concluded. If by 8pm participants had not completed their statements and discussion until another time. The Chairman indicated that he was aware that the Irish Government intended hosting a dinner for participants but they had agreed that it could be delayed until 8pm.

4. The UUP explained that their front bench team intended attending Enoch Powell funeral in London the next day. They would have to leave at 7.45pm at the very latest that evening although they confirmed that there would be UUP representation until the close of business. The Chairman informed the UUP that they would have an opportunity to make representations to Plenary before they had to leave. Sinn Fein asked if the Irish Government would take steps to shorten the UUP members trip to the Airport and their passage through it. They were keen that the UUP should remain until the last

possible minute. Sinn Fein also raised the order of proceedings. The Chairman explained that he intended to follow to order of which he had indicated earlier but would take further account of the point made by the Alliance party in their most recent statement. The UUP suggested that in order to save some time was there anything in the legal advice which Sinn Fein were seeking which would prevent both Governments from making their opening statements now. Sinn Fein responded by saying that they had a legal avenue to follow before any proceedings started.

5. The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 3.20pm and indicated that he wanted at prompt start at 5.00pm. He would revisit to order of proceedings then. It was important that all participants be given an opportunity to make any representation they felt necessary.

**Independent Chairmen Notetakers
17 February 1997**