

SUMMARY RECORD OF LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING ON CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES ON WEDNESDAY 4 MARCH 1998 (11.25)

CHAIRMAN: Mr Holkeri

THOSE PRESENT: British Government
Irish Government

Alliance
Labour
Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
Progressive Unionist Party
Social Democratic and Labour Party
Ulster Democratic Party
Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman convened the meeting at 11.25 and stated that on behalf of the Independent Chairmen, and all the participants, he wished to utterly condemn the cowardly murders of the previous night in Poyntzpass. He stated that everyone's thoughts were with the families of the innocent victims of these sectarian killings. Everyone knew that these acts of violence were directed against the process. Therefore the Chairman stated that he was convinced that the only way to react to this madness was to do everything possible in the efforts to reach a settlement as soon as possible that would bring peace, stability and reconciliation.

2. The Chairman stated that there were two sets of minutes to be approved from meetings on 4 and 10 February. These had been previously circulated and subject to any views from the participants, would now be approved. The NIWC said it had not received copies of those minutes. The Chairman said he would

therefore defer approval of these minutes to the next meeting. Moving on, the Chairman said that the last meeting had concluded, for the time being, discussions on agenda item 3 of the agreed agenda - paramilitary activity. At the end of that meeting the agenda for today's session had been left open. The Chairman said the options would be to continue to move on to the next item of the agenda, to come back to social and economic issues and in particular cultural matters or to return to prisoners issues. The Chairman said the views of participants had been solicited on this and it seemed to him that it would be best to discuss cultural issues. This was agreed.

3. The Chairman said an SDLP paper on the subject was circulated on 11 February. A British Government paper was circulated the previous day and a PUP paper had just been circulated at the beginning of the meeting. The Chairman said he now proposed to begin in the normal manner and turned to the British Government to start the discussion on a tour de table basis.

4. The British Government said it wished to be associated with the Chairman's remarks of condemnation of the senseless and wicked violence of the previous evening. There was no doubt that such incidents put more pressure on the talks participants to make the process work. But clearly there was no alternative. By a strange coincidence the British Government said it was due to visit Craigavon Area Hospital later in the day where the two survivors were located and Ministerial presence would therefore have to be withdrawn from the Sub-committee around 13.00. The British Government said it would pass on everyone's good wishes to them for a speedy recovery.

5. Moving on, the British Government said that in Northern Ireland cultural issues were not peripheral matters. They were closely associated with the identities of the Unionist and Nationalist communities and with how each perceived the other. They were often linked to each community's sense of

political allegiance. Cultural differences could be both a symptom and a cause of communal and political division. They therefore needed to be taken seriously and the British Government was doing this. It believed also that cultural diversity was to be welcomed.

6. The British Government said it had circulated a paper on cultural issues. It focused on the relationship between the Government and those local cultural traditions which were associated ,particularly with the Nationalist and Unionist political outlooks - the Irish language, the British/Unionist historical heritage, Ulster-Scots. The paper dealt to a large extent with arrangements for Government funding, as this was considered by many to be an important indicator of the Government's attitude to these traditions.

7. At a time of financial constraints, the British Government said both it and its predecessors had made available considerable sums of money for local cultural traditions to allow people to express more freely their cultural identity. The funding of the Irish language, through Irish medium schools, was one example of this. There were, however, some who would say that it did not spend enough money. That was a valid viewpoint, but Government finance was about hard choices and there were many competing claims for financial resources. The British Government said it operated on the principle that funding applications should be considered on their merits, in the context of clear spending criteria which was both transparent and fair.

8. The British Government said its paper devoted particular attention to the Irish language. The levels of Government support to the language had increased over the past decade. In particular, it had responded to the growing Irish medium education sector. There were now seven grant aided primary schools attended by over 1,000 pupils and one grant aided secondary school attended by 231 pupils. Total recurrent grants amounted to £1.8m in the current financial year.

The British Government said it had made clear its willingness to support Irish medium schools where there was a sustainable demand, but criteria had to be applied, above all in terms of future numbers. This was being done, not simply for financial reasons but because it would be difficult to deliver the statutory curriculum effectively in very small schools. The British Government said that in recent years the long term enrolment criteria had been maintained at a similar level for Irish medium and integrated schools. In line with a recent revision of the threshold for integrated secondary schools, it had now decided to reduce the long term enrolment criteria for Irish medium secondary schools. In addition to financial support, however it had put in place appropriate arrangements to ensure curriculum support, initial teacher training and in service training to meet the needs of the Irish medium sector and had also given this sector a role in the planning of the pre school education expansion programme.

9. Moving on, the British Government said it was keeping under active review other aspects of its policy towards the Irish language and the implications of the possible UK signature of the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority languages.

10. It was also financially supporting aspects of Northern Ireland's cultural heritage which were particularly relevant to the unionist community. For example there had been considerable interest shown in recent years in the participation of people from the region in the first World War and particularly the Battle of the Somme. Requests for financial assistance towards other traditions associated with military service and links with Scotland would also be considered on their merits. The British Government said it could be argued that it had taken too narrow a focus in its definition of cultural issues for the purpose of its paper. There was a whole range of media related issues; some of which had been touched on in the paper, which required further development. Furthermore there might be those who would say that questions of national allegiance and issues

such as parades were also cultural matters, but the British Government didn't believe that today was an appropriate opportunity to address such wider issues. It therefore hoped that the debate would focus on the types of cultural issues covered by its paper.

11. The Irish Government said it wished to be associated with the previous remarks concerning the murders at Poyntzpass. Such incidents only hastened the need to find a solution and put to an end such senseless and wicked violence. The Irish Government said it welcomed this opportunity to provide some further indication of its view on cultural issues in the context of this discussion on conference building measures. In the past the Northern Ireland administration had been at best indifferent, and at times hostile, to the Irish or Gaelic strand in its cultural heritage. However there had, over the past 10 years in particular, been a significant improvement in this regard. The acknowledgement of and support provided for Irish cultural activities, whether it be Irish music and dance or Gaelic games, had improved considerably. The work carried out by the British Government through the introduction of Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and its encouragement of North/South Co-operation across a wide range of cultural areas, as well as the contribution made by the Cultural Traditions Group of the Community Relations Council and the Ultach Trust, all represented real progress.

12. Progress had also been made with regard to the most important component in Gaelic culture, the Irish language, and this had been particularly so in the case of Irish Medium schools. The position of the Irish language was very much a litmus test of the achievement of cultural parity of esteem. The Irish Government said the following were among the steps which it believed should be undertaken in order to foster the Irish language and to achieve cultural parity of esteem. First, it would be desirable to accord the Irish language an official status within Northern Ireland. This would reflect the esteem in which it was held by a

large section of the population across both communities and would protect the rights of Irish speakers. Second, there should be a pro-active Government policy with regard to the promotion of the language. Third, the development of the Irish-medium schools system should be encouraged and facilitated as a matter of public policy, and recognition criteria put in place which would take into account the needs of these schools, as well as internationally accepted best practice with regard to minority language groups. There should be a formal statutory basis for the Irish-medium schools system. There should also be recognition of, and funding for, the representative body for Irish-medium schools Gaeloiliúint. Fourth, support should be provided for Irish-language broadcasting similar to that presently being provided for Gaelic broadcasting in Scotland.

13. The Irish Government said in this context that it would be supportive of proposals to encourage the recognition of Ullans as part of the shared heritage of all people of the island. The support provided for Lallans in Scotland might be a helpful benchmark in this regard. It was also mindful of the Unionist interest in the preservation of Battle of the Boyne site in County Meath. The Minister for Foreign Affairs recently indicated his intention to have officials examine the options in this regard. The Irish Government said it would be supplying shortly a paper which developed its ideas in more detail. Measures to promote and protect cultural heritage, and in particular the Irish language, would it believed play a key role in building confidence within both communities and as an eventual ingredient for a political settlement. It looked forward to debate on these issues.

14. Alliance said it also wished to condemn the recent violence and in particular the appalling murders of Mr Allen and Mr Trainor the previous evening. Such incidents meant that everyone around the table had to redouble their efforts to achieve a settlement. The party said it agreed with some of the points made by both Governments in their respective statements. It did, however, have some difficulty with the language and scope of the British Government paper. The

party said it was somewhat disappointed that the paper had limited itself to language issues such as the Irish language and that of the Ulster/Scots. Culture in Northern Ireland meant much more than this with a range of Irish sports, the arts and other activities etc.

15. Alliance said it supported and cherished a cultural diversity in Northern Ireland. The party believed there was already a certain degree of pluralism in society here but wished to encourage more. It was concerned that only lip service was being paid to cultural diversity with people slipping back into describing Northern Ireland in terms of “the two communities”, “Protestants and Catholics” and “unionists and nationalists”. Alliance said the Governments were guilty of doing this as well. The party said it recognised the deep divisions in society - that was the reason why everyone was gathered around the table - but it was trying to bridge those divisions. It was therefore wrong and counterproductive to use terms like the “two communities”. Cultures had to be protected but it was important to realise that two distinct and isolated cultures didn't exist in Northern Ireland. Furthermore terms such as the “two communities” were dangerous descriptions because neither was hermetically sealed one from the other.

16. In similar ways use of the terms Protestant and Catholic were unsuitable. Indeed many Protestants had more in common with Catholics than their co-religionists. Articulating divisions between “unionists and nationalists” was no better. There was over 10% of the working population who supported parties other than unionist or nationalist and it was wrong to describe unionism and nationalism as monolithic blocks. There was a centre ground out there which included many liberals, moderate unionists and moderate nationalists. Alliance said it was hopeful that the process was moving towards an agreement that had power and responsibility sharing at its core. It would help the prospects for power sharing if a more pluralist society could develop rather than what the

rigidity of the two communities could provide. This hopefully explained the party's objections to terms such as "the two communities" and in particular to the descriptions of the rights and languages of the nationalist community. In the party's view there were major cultures in Northern Ireland but these didn't exist in isolation one from the other.

17. Alliance said cultures influenced other cultures and fed on each other. It was important that cultures were not regarded as the exclusive preserve of particular sections of the community. The party said it recognised the importance of the Irish language to a large number of people in Northern Ireland and it supported its promotion. The party said that recently it had put through a proposal in Belfast City Hall to promote cultural diversity with a particular focus on language and this had been passed the previous evening. The party said it supported the funding of Irish language schools thereby enabling parental choice to be reflected. Moving on, the party said it was disappointed with the Government's funding of integrated schools and in this context it was important to recognise the wishes of parents to choose which sector of the educational system they wished to send their children to. It also had to be remembered that there was support for integrated schools across the political spectrum.

18. Turning to the Irish Government's remarks, Alliance said it was somewhat concerned about institutionalising the Irish language or putting it on a par with English. One couldn't describe Northern Ireland as a genuine bilingual country in the same way as one would describe Canada where the Canadian Charter of Rights permitted both French and Canadian to be regarded on equal terms. In Northern Ireland, the vast majority of people spoke English as the first choice language. Irish was second and should therefore be promoted as such. The party said it concurred with the British Government in relation to its remarks on the Ulster/Scots language. However the party added that it had a slight concern that the promotion of Ulster/Scots was a reaction to the promotion of the Irish

language and there was a need to depoliticise culture as much as possible. Finally in terms of the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the party said it wished to reserve its judgement with regard to whether it should be ratified by the British Government.

19. Labour expressed its great sadness at the murders the previous evening and utterly condemned them. Moving on, the party said it had an open mind on cultural matters. Some of its representatives had lived in Northern Ireland at a time when the Irish culture had been suppressed, but in the last 30 years they had seen changes. The party said it supported the facilitation of all diverse languages and aspects of culture etc. However, it had severe reservations about the Government's intentions to promote the Irish language. Labour said there was a danger that such promotion could lead to the generation of separate cultures in so far as there was one party at the talks who appeared to be using the promotion of cultural issues and the Irish language in particular to develop a separatist agenda. The party said the British Government had to be wary of this. Labour said it supported funding on the basis of mutual understanding of each other's cultures. Finally the party said that it had been amazed at the Irish Government's comments which appeared to imply that it was simply wonderful at promoting culture in its own jurisdiction so, by definition, the people of Northern Ireland should be doing much better in theirs. Statements like this were not helpful.

20. The NIWC expressed condemnation of the previous evening's murders. It said it had listened to all the comments and had also read those papers distributed on the issues. There was no doubt that culture lay at the heart of the problems in Northern Ireland. The party said it wished to propose a model of cultural diversity and respect but, as had already been mentioned, some people used cultural issues as a weapon and hence it had become a topic which, rather than increasing awareness of cultural diversity, only created further segregation.

The party said one needed to remember the legacy of the suppression of the Irish language in the context that any expressions of cultural diversity were not commencing from an equal position.

21. The NIWC said it wished to promote parity of esteem across all cultures. There was a need to loosen up rigidity in Northern Ireland society and move away from the situation where people were categorised as being part of one community or the other almost from birth. The party said, in terms of the pursuit of cultural identity, it wished to urge that every option was made available including full choices for parents in the educational sector. The NIWC stated that it believed there was quite a groundswell in the public domain which was looking to be liberated from the present cultural positions and move to a position where they could express their own more freely. The party was very much in favour of looking at all cultural traditions and enshrining these, including those of the ethnic minority groups, but Northern Ireland still had a long way to go to develop into a pluralist society. An example of this was the view most people took of the travelling community. Their culture was not recognised and their living conditions were on a par with a third world country. The party said this community had a long way to go to gain respect for their culture.

22. Moving on, the party said it was concerned about the possibility of the Government playing off Irish language schools against integrated schools. The party said rather than this it should be a case of making all the options available to enable society to be opened up. As an example of the latter point, the NIWC said there were many Protestants who were interested in the Irish language and the party welcomed developments such as this and moves to depoliticise the issue. The same was true of the Ulster/Scots language and the party welcomed the PUP's paper on this today.

23. The NIWC said steps also needed to be taken to remove the culture of male dominated society and Government needed to be careful not to close down on the expression of culture in deprived areas but instead to tap into this. There were many examples of thriving culture being expressed in these areas with festivals such as the West Belfast Festival, the Shankill Festival, the multi-cultural festival, the International Women's Day celebrations and the St Patrick's Day initiatives all of which had a broad canvas of support across the community. The party said it welcomed all of these and viewed them as a reawakening of people and their culture. Expression of one's own cultural identity was one thing. How one ensured, however, that those in the community recognised, became more aware of and accepted other cultures was less easy to address. Being able to listen and being open minded about it was a beginning.

24. The PUP repudiated the previous evening's murders and said they were an attack on the peace process. The party added that it believed some consideration ought to be given to dealing with those who provide the LVF with spiritual and political analysis and guidance. The PUP said it acknowledged the following cultural traditions in Northern Ireland: the indigenous Irish-Gaelic culture; the Anglo-Irish culture; the Ulster-Scots culture and the cultures of those ethnic groups from other nations who had settled in the Province. The party said it wished to outline some basic principles.

25. Firstly, each of the cultures above had their own particular modes of expression and celebration: language, prose, poetry, drama, music, dance, rituals, symbols, and emblems. Very often these modes of expression and celebration were integral to the value and worth of the culture itself. To deny the mode of expression or celebration was to deny the validity of the culture itself, and the authenticity of the people who cherished that culture. An example of this was the marching tradition in Orangeism as well as the wearing of the poppy. The PUP said it called upon each party and both Governments to validate each

of these cultures together with the several modes of expression and celebration associated with them. Secondly, each citizen of Northern Ireland had an inalienable right to watch over, promote, protect and enjoy the cultural tradition with which he or she chose to identify. The PUP said it called upon all parties and both governments to affirm this principle in both word and deed. Thirdly, both the Anglo-Irish and the Ulster-Scots cultures had been in Ireland long enough to have assimilated elements of the Irish-Gaelic culture and of each other's culture. The same was true for the Irish-Gaelic culture. It had embraced elements of both the Anglo-Irish and the Ulster-Scots cultures. For many the terms Anglo-Irish and Ulster-Scots had been replaced by the term British and it was in this sense that they regarded themselves as the British presence in Ireland. They had been in Ireland long enough to have acknowledged their Irishness, but without rejecting their inherited British cultural traits or their inherent sense of Britishness. The PUP said it called upon all parties and both governments to acknowledge that each separate culture had been enriched through its interaction with each other and that the development and enjoyment of one's own culture should not be pursued at the expense of, or to the detriment of, another culture. Finally those of Anglo-Irish and Ulster-Scottish (British) descent had as much right to embrace the term "Irish" as those who claimed (often dubiously) to be of pure Irish-Gaelic stock (whatever that might be). Nationalists had no difficulty in accepting the validity of the term "Irish-American" yet they ridiculed those who wished to define their Irishness in terms of their inherited Anglo or Scottish culture and their ongoing sense of Britishness. The PUP said it called upon all parties and both Governments to validate the right of those unionists who so desired it to lay claim to the name "Irish" and to further acknowledge that the terms "Irish" and "Irishness" transcend religion and politics.

26. The party said, in relation to the Ulster-Scots, that the SDLP paper made reference to the introduction of both English and Lallans into Ulster during the 16th century. It trusted this was an acknowledgement by the party that Lallans

and its sister language Ullans were legitimate linguistic forms. Despite the existence of a rich literary tradition extending back for centuries, Ulster-Scots (Ullans) was today a highly stigmatised language. Thirty years ago the late Brendan Adams of the Ulster Folk Museum estimated that there were then about 170,000 Ulster-Scots speakers. Philip Robinson of the Ulster-Scots Academy estimated “that in the absence of census data, around 100,000 people in the Ulster-Scots areas of Northern Ireland and Donegal were capable of speaking both Ulster-English and Ulster-Scots”.

27. While the PUP was not involved in the movements seeking to revive Ulster-Scots, it believed that Ullans was an important part of its British heritage. This was particularly so in relation to the literature of the Ulster-Scots community published in the 17th and 18th centuries. It seemed strange to the party that while nationalists and republicans had much to say about the contribution of Presbyterians to the United Irishmen they had so little to say about the language spoken by the United Irishmen. Many of the writings of the United Irishmen from Antrim and Down were written in classic Ullans. The hostility shown by both nationalists and republicans towards the Ulster-Scottish culture in general and the Ulster-Scots language in particular revealed the true extent of their commitment to parity of cultural esteem.

28. The PUP said it would submit that Ulster-Scots went beyond language. There was a rich cultural heritage prevalent in Antrim and Down - Scottish Country Dancing, Scottish Pipe Bands, Piping and Drumming, Burns Clubs etc - which had survived simply because of the participation and contribution of the people who enjoyed those activities. While it accepted the statement by the British Government that financial support for Irish-Gaelic culture should not be used as a benchmark for funding the Ulster-Scots culture, it was concerned that both the British Government and other funding agencies had been reluctant to treat the promotion of both cultural traditions in an even-handed manner. CCRU

had spend more in one year on Irish-Gaelic culture than it had in its 10 year existence on the promotion of Ulster-Scots and other elements of British culture.

29. The party, continuing on this theme, said it wished to provide some further examples of the vast discrepancies in funding which were occurring between these cultures. The PUP said that some of the Scottish Pipe Band Associations in Northern Ireland were only receiving money from Local Councils for attendance at contests. Furthermore some Councils, such as Newry, appeared to fund only on a political basis when it had, in the past, refused to have the RUC band present at local festivals thereby suggesting that culture should be conditionalised. The party added that the Northern Ireland Piping and Drumming School only received £7k from the Arts Council under somewhat restrictive conditions. The question in all of this was how could culture be developed when there was no Government support for it. Another example was Burns Clubs in Northern Ireland. These occasionally only received small grants. The party said it seemed as though the Ulster-Scots culture was being promoted at the expense of the people who practised it.

30. The PUP referred to the GAA and asked why it appeared that this issue was treated as a cultural matter but soccer wasn't? Similarly why was camogie treated as cultural but hockey wasn't? With regard to Orangeism, there were some 100,000 members of the Order which was international in composition. The party said it was totally wrong to demonise the Orange movement as sectarian bigots. This didn't do any service to the honesty and integrity of its members. Likewise neither did the most recent comments regarding question marks over Mr Cheever's membership of the Parades Commission as a result of his previous background. There was also the issue of the long-existing socialist culture. This had been kept alive by those who looked upon people for their honesty and integrity rather than their political identity and who looked to the

emancipation of the ordinary people. The party said that hopefully in any settlement this could still provide an alternative culture.

31. The PUP referred to military service and said that this had been a tradition and a way of life for many in the Protestant community. Many had joined the services to express their loyalist identity. It also had to be remembered that despite the fact that the 16th Irish and the 36th Ulster Divisions had fought side by side at the Somme, it still considered that it was time to rehabilitate the 16th Irish. Its role should not be diminished because it served a “foreign crown”.

32. The SDLP said it agreed with the PUP that they should cherish all their cultural identities; one of the tragedies of the conflict was that culture had been demeaned on all sides. The Unionist flag had been used to provoke, and both sides had painted kerb stones to mark their territory. Language had also been used as a weapon, and Orangeism, which the SDLP said was a fine culture, had also been used to provoke. The funding of pipe bands was an important issue that needed to be addressed. The SDLP said there was something of all Northern Ireland’s cultures in each of its people, and the Gaelic heritage was all around them.

33. The SDLP said parity of linguistic esteem should not be perceived as a threat. The Irish language should enrich everyone, as it was part of their shared heritage. Cultural parity of esteem was a basic civil right and was recognised internationally as such. It said there were parts of Northern Ireland, such as the Sperrins and the Antrim Glens, which had died as Irish speaking areas because of the neglect and hostility of previous Northern Ireland administrations. It said the British Government should adopt a proactive approach to Irish. It noted that the 1991 census had revealed a total of 142,000 people with a knowledge of Irish, of whom 45,000 were speakers, 10,000 could read, and 86,000 could both read and write the language.

34. The SDLP said there was a new understanding that everyone had a right to promote their culture, and this was reflected in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration, the Framework Document, in the EU and international conventions such as the European Convention for the Protection of Lesser Used and Minority Languages. The SDLP welcomed recent changes in official attitudes to Irish in Northern Ireland, but said policy was still negative and reactive. It referred to paragraph five of the British Government paper which spoke of removing obstacles. It also asked the British Government what it meant when it said its Irish language policy was situated 'in the context of Northern Ireland's many-stranded cultural heritage'. The party supported multi-culturalism, but Irish was an indigenous language and in a different category to those spoken by recent migrants. It wished to encourage Unionists to see Irish as enriching and part of their heritage rather than threatening, though it accepted that it had been used by some as a weapon for political purposes.

35. The SDLP challenged the British Government's assertion that in Northern Ireland there were no geographic areas which had seen an unbroken tradition of Irish usage. It said there was a network of Irish speakers, and instanced also the Irish speaking community on Shaw's Road in West Belfast. There was a proven demand for Irish language provision and it was difficult to accept that there was no comparison with Welsh or Scots Gaelic. The party compared previous British Government's commitments to maintain, develop and increase the use of Gaelic in Scotland with undertakings only to encourage interest in Irish. It said Irish-speaking areas had floundered because of lack of funding or governmental support.

36. The SDLP welcomed changes to the criteria needed for recognition of Irish-medium and integrated schools, but said they should be treated as need arose. It called on the British Government to amend the Education Act to provide

a statutory basis for Irish-medium education as had been done for the integrated sector. The party described as misleading the British Government's comments in its paper that 90% of Irish-medium schools received full grant aid as this figure did not include the many schools, such as Meanscoil Dhoire and schools in Dunloy, Maghera and Coalisland, which had not been recognised by the Department of Education. The SDLP welcomed the extension of Irish language education to the nursery and pre-school sectors, and the appointment of a representative to the committee over-seeing this sector in each of the Education and Library Board areas. It also applauded the curriculum support provided for teacher training and GCSEs.

37. Turning to Irish in the media, the SDLP said Telefís na Gaeilge was a huge asset and welcomed the improvement in its reception in Northern Ireland. However, the party contrasted the £9 million spent on Gaelic TV in Scotland each year, with the £25,000 grant to the newspaper 'Lá'. It called for funding to support Irish-medium technical training in the broadcasting sector. It also asked the British Government when it would reach a decision on whether to sign the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, as it had already been under consideration for three years. The SDLP said it was supportive of the development of Ullans, which was also a part of their shared cultural heritage, and suggested that the level of funding for Lallans in Scotland be used as a benchmark.

38. The SDLP made the following recommendations to the British Government: (1) the British Government should become a signatory to the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages without further delay; (2) the British Government should recognise the inadequate support for Irish language and culture in the past, and commit itself to a more proactive policy with regard to the development of the language in the future; (3) the Education Act should be amended to provide a statutory basis for the Gaelscoileanna

system; (4) within the schools system, steps should be taken to devise official criteria for recognition and support more appropriate to the needs of Irish-medium education to enable schools to be established in conditions, and with the necessary personnel and resources, to provide education in keeping with modern demands and on a basis equal to those, attending English medium schools; (5) at teacher training and in third level education generally, the needs of Irish should be reviewed to ensure that an adequate supply of qualified teachers for Irish-medium schools should be provided. In this respect, opportunities for co-operation with the authorities and third-level institutions in the South should be examined; (6) a special unit should be established within the Department of Education to monitor developments in Irish medium education, and the teaching of Irish generally; (7) the production of radio and television Irish-medium programmes should be encouraged and supported. In this respect, co-operation between programme makers North and South should be extended. This was particularly important given the existence of an Irish-medium television channel in the South, Telefís na Gaeilge, which also made it essential that the question of the reception of television signals on an all-Ireland basis be resolved as a matter of urgency; (8) support of Irish medium initiatives of an individual, group and community basis should be enhanced within the arts, North-South co-operation with other Celtic speaking communities, especially in Scotland, should be intensified with appropriate financial backing; (9) within the public sector measures should be taken to ensure that conducting business through the medium of Irish is recognised as a civil right, and that gradually the means of doing that be made available by identifying from within the civil service persons with a knowledge of Irish who are able and willing to conduct business in Irish; (10) within the business sector opportunities for using Irish should be identified and developed; (11) the role of Iontaobhas Ultach (Ultach Trust) should be enhanced with increased resources to enable it to raise its profile and to contribute more effectively to the promotion of Irish across the whole community.

39. The UDP said it wished to be associated with the condemnation of the murders in Poyntzpass. These were deplorable killings which were designed to put pressure on the talks in an attempt to bring about their collapse. The party felt there was a risk that sectarian tensions might become heightened as participants moved closer to a settlement. The UDP regretted that only two paragraphs of the British Government's paper dealt with Unionist culture, and then only by addressing the subject of marching. The party said it agreed with the PUP's presentation. They should be careful not to divide culture between communities as this would produce a kind of cultural apartheid. There were very few aspects of culture in Northern Ireland that were the monopoly of one community. They has a shared history, and they should point up the shared aspects of their culture. The UDP said it was preparing a paper on the subject which it would circulate in due course.

40. The UUP condemned the killings in Poyntzpass. It referred to the famous comment by Göring that he would reach for his revolver when he heard mention of the word culture. It observed that prosecutions were in train for crimes against humanity in Bosnia. Condemnation was not enough, and the party expressed the hope that something similar would happen in Northern Ireland after a settlement. The UUP welcomed the British Government paper, and agreed with the SDLP that culture should not be seen as a threat. The party observed that Irish language and culture had in the past been hijacked by republicanism, which was unfortunate. There had been an equal demonisation of Unionist culture, such as the national anthem, parades and military commemoration. It said that parades were seen as triumphalist by nationalists; they were also a sign of solidarity in difficult times. The UUP said it envisaged a society in which the culture of each community was enhanced. It welcomed the support of the Irish Government for Lallans, and observed that co-operation between Northern Ireland and Scotland on this area, along the lines of the Dutch-Flemish Language Union, could take place under a Council of the Isles. Turning to paragraph 13 of

the British Government paper, it asked what were the difficulties that prevented the British Government from signing the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. It said Britain was a multicultural society, and that devolution was taking place along cultural lines. Accordingly, it was essential that the British Government sign and ratify this charter, observing that, under section three, each State party to the Charter was required to specify to which languages its provisions would apply. The UUP also expressed its hope that the British Government would sign up to the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and read from articles five and six of this Convention. The party said it was the responsibility of both communities to spread the spirit of cultural tolerance, and recalled the words of Senator Friedl Volgger of the Südtiroler Volkspartei that each community should live by, for, but not through each other.

41. The British Government welcomed the consensus. Addressing the PUP, it said the economic disparity in funding between Irish language organisations and Unionist cultural organisations over the preceding decade resulted from the more recent establishment of the latter. It also observed that a number of pipe bands had received support from the National Lottery. Turning to points raised by the SDLP, it said the existence of a geographic heartland in Scotland and Wales made it much easier to estimate future school numbers than in Northern Ireland. It said that a 'many stranded cultural heritage' was the reality in Northern Ireland, and hoped the SDLP had not meant to imply that some cultures were more valid than others. It also referred the party to a recent statement regarding the Colombia project. Turning to points made by the UUP, it said the previous British Government had decided not to sign the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1996, but the present administration had reopened the matter and a decision could be expected imminently. The British Government said the Charter was a complicated document, with various levels of provisions, which could be applied to several minority languages.

42. The SDLP said it had not implied that some cultures were more valid, and asked the British Government to expand on its comments. The British Government said there were several components to Northern Ireland's cultural heritage - it had listed three, and there were also more recent additions. These were woven together into a complex tapestry. The Irish language should be seen in this context. The SDLP accepted that there were other cultures, but pointed out that the Irish language and culture were part of the nationalist identity even among those who did not speak the language. Parity of esteem with Unionist culture was therefore essential. The party observed that parts of Wales, such as Glamorgan, were 9% Welsh speaking yet had a school for 25 pupils, while others needed 200 pupils, compared with the required 400 in Northern Ireland. The SDLP said they needed to accept others' cultures. Culture was not static, yet in the past there had been one dominant culture. It was imperative that government ensure that that different cultures were treated equally. Since 1992 cultural diversity had been part of the school curriculum under the Education for Mutual Understanding programme. All kinds of schools had a contribution to make to this, and joint initiatives were to be encouraged. It was timely for a review of the programme. The SDLP referred to the problems the British Government had said it faced in predicting the numbers required for a school, and pointed to the contribution of parents in both the Irish-medium and integrated sectors. It noted that the Department of Education had provided a £1m fund to carry over integrated schools while they awaited formal recognition, and called for a similar fund for Irish-medium schools.

43. The Irish Government said that it advocated nothing for Northern Ireland that it was not already implementing in its own jurisdiction. Irish was one of the two official languages of the State, and there was a real commitment on the part of Government to its progress in education and culture. Funding was provided for Irish language secondary schools on the basis of need, and cultural

organisations received subsidies. This was especially true of the Gaeltacht. There was also Radio na Gaeltachta, which had been broadcasting for 25 years, and Telefís na Gaeilge, which had been on air for over a year. Referring to a point raised by the PUP, the Irish Government said it was part funding the Messine Ridge Memorial in Belgium, and referred to the visit by the former Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dick Spring, to the Somme Heritage Centre in 1995, when he had said that the experience of those who had fought at the Somme was part of the heritage of all the people of Ireland.

44. The PUP, responding to comments by the British Government, said the Heritage Council had recently described the Lambeg drum as not cultural and refused funding. It would like to see a thorough review of the Education through Mutual Understanding programme, as it believed that at present it was not functioning to the fullest extent. The Chairman proposed that the meeting adjourn. The Business Committee had set 10 March as the date for the next meeting, when they would discuss security issues. In response to a query from the NIWC regarding weekly meetings, it was agreed that they would follow the advice of the Business Committee, which was due to meet the following week. There would be no meeting the week of 17 March.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers 20 March 1998