

## RESPONSE TO SINN FEIN PAPERS 9 and 19 DECEMBER 1994

The Government believes that a constructive beginning has been made to the exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein and we are fully committed to sustaining and developing that dialogue as we move towards inclusive political negotiations. We welcome the evident common ground in our opening statement and in Sinn Fein's Towards a Negotiated Settlement 1 and 2 of 9 and 19 December. The Government is encouraged by that and, although we expect more plain speaking - as there has been in our first two meetings - we are confident that we can make progress across a broad agenda.

Common ground

2. You say that inclusive negotiations are necessary to address all the issues which have given rise to conflict and division. In our opening statement we make plain our belief that the fundamental issues facing Northern Ireland can be most satisfactorily addressed and resolved through inclusive political negotiations which we hope will include Sinn Fein. In your opening statement you said that if they are to be successful inclusive negotiations must address all the issues without pre-conditions and without any attempt to predetermine the outcome. We described the negotiations as needing to address a broad agenda across all the relevant relationships with no issue excluded and no outcome predetermined.

3. In Towards a Negotiated Settlement 2 you argue that your stated objective is to see the removal of all guns from Irish politics. That is also our aim, and it is shared by the Irish Government. You say that it is as part of an overall political settlement which would permanently remove conflict that the existence of armed groups needs to be resolved. We accept too that, in practice, there is a

link between the decommissioning of arms and the political process. You believe, perhaps that arms can and will be decommissioned when the IRA accepts an analysis that the political context provides for Sinn Fein to have access to a realistic and meaningful process of inclusive dialogue about political arrangements concerning Northern Ireland. The Government believes that as a matter both of principle and of political reality substantial progress on the issue of decommissioning would be necessary before Sinn Fein could and would be included in such a dialogue. Both sides also note the relevance of progress in respect of the issue of decommissioning loyalist arms. Sinn Fein has also pointed to the possible relevance of the holdings, on a legal basis, of weapons by individuals in Northern Ireland. The Government recognises that decommissioning will have implications for decisions and measures taken by the security forces, including decisions on deployment.

#### Differences

4. Clearly though there are differences between us. Towards a Negotiated Settlement 2 argues that the Government has the central responsibility for turning the potential for a lasting settlement into a reality and suggests that we are seeking to delay and erect barriers to forward movement.

5. We reject that judgement. We do accept that the IRA's initiative of 31 August 1994 and subsequent developments have provided an unprecedented opportunity for the resolution of the conflict. The Government's response has been neither grudging nor foot-dragging. The broadcasting restrictions on Sinn Fein and others have been ended. Exclusion orders on Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness have been lifted. Soldiers have been taken off streets throughout the better part of Northern Ireland, including Derry and Belfast, and military patrolling has been significantly reduced. The border with the Irish Republic has been fully opened. And we have, of course, opened this first direct dialogue between



Sinn Fein and the Government. The Government wishes neither to delay nor to erect barriers to forward movement; on the contrary, the Government wishes to move the process forward in order to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland can permanently enjoy all of the benefits that peace can bring.

6. More fundamentally you also argue in Towards a Negotiated Settlement 2 that British sovereignty in Northern Ireland is 'self-evidently' the cause of political instability and conflict. The ending of British jurisdiction, you say must be addressed to remove the cause of instability and conflict. We do not accept that British sovereignty in Northern Ireland, based as it is on the continuing consent of the people of Northern Ireland, is the cause of conflict; if it is, then this conflict is with democracy.

7. In Towards a Negotiated Settlement you recognise that unionist concerns must be resolved, and you describe the need for a process of national reconciliation. We believe that this is a wholly justified recognition that Northern Ireland has a deeply divided community, characterised by traditions and identities which extend beyond Northern Ireland itself to the rest of the island of Ireland and to the rest of the United Kingdom. Is that, in fact, your view?

8. For our part we accept that the totality of these relationships must be addressed in the inclusive talks process and we do not seek to predetermine the outcome of those negotiations. Unfortunately it appears from Towards a Negotiated Settlement 2 that you suggest failure to reach an acceptable political settlement will inevitably result in conflict. Acceptable to whom? Would it be correct to interpret you as seeking to insist only on an outcome which involves an end to Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom regardless of the wishes of a majority of its people? If the inclusive negotiations were to produce an agreement and that outcome was put, as the Prime Minister has said it will be, to the people in a

referendum and broadly endorsed by them, what would Sinn Fein's reaction be? Would it accept the democratic decision of the people?

9. We note also that in its 1992 document Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland Sinn Fein said that the Irish people have a right to political structures which are capable of sustaining peace - making peace permanent. What sort of structures do you foresee fitting that requirement?

Sinn Fein's questions about talks

10. At the end of Towards a Negotiated Settlement 2 you also asked us some direct questions about the talks process:

a. When do you intend to initiate with the Dublin Government, all-party talks?

We envisage the next step as being publication in the fairly near future of the Joint Framework Document which we hope to agree shortly with the Irish Government. At the same time we shall publish our own understanding of the likely basis for a settlement involving new relationships and institutions in Northern Ireland. These are not intended to be a blueprint, but rather an agenda for further talks. As the Prime Minister has announced we intend to publish these proposals so that we and other participants in the negotiations can take account of the views of the people. We have also said that we want to open dialogue on the basis of those proposals with the main constitutional parties. The publication of the Joint Framework Document and our Strand 1 proposals will provide an agenda on which Sinn Fein might wish to comment with a view to establishing the basis upon which it would enter the talks.

b. What format will these talks follow?

That is not solely a matter for the Government. We believe that the inclusive negotiations will bring together the main constitutional parties, including, we hope, Sinn Fein, although this need not



necessarily be precisely in the same manner as during 1992. It may, for example, be possible to proceed initially on the basis of more extensive bilateral negotiations. What is Sinn Fein's view on the format for talks?

c. How will the various parties to the negotiations, including the British Government, be represented?

Ministers will certainly lead for the British Government. Ground rules for talks were agreed by previous participants and the Government is prepared to abide by that agreement. However, again this is not solely a matter for us but will be something for all those involved to determine. We should be interested to hear Sinn Fein's views on this question too.

d. Where will these talks take place?

In 1992 there were meetings in London, Dublin and here in Parliament Buildings in Belfast. Our expectation is that similar arrangements could be agreed for fresh talks. Again this is a matter on which we would be interested to hear the views of all parties, including Sinn Féin. The British Government does not wish to set any deadline on the process. The important thing is to achieve a stable, durable and workable political settlement which secures widespread consent across the community in Northern Ireland. Our hope is that we are able to begin the inclusive negotiations sooner rather than later, but this is a matter in which others, including the Irish Government will have a view of their own.

What next?

11. We think the Government and Sinn Fein can make a positive contribution to moving forward what you describe as the most urgent stage of the evolving peace process by continuing wide-ranging discussions here on an open agenda. This should include matters

such as the ground rules for the political talks process, housing, education, health care, crime, fair employment, prison issues and the Irish language, as well as exploring the practical consequences of the ending of violence. We argued in our earlier meetings that it would be sensible to agree a programme of work for our dialogue and we attach some suggestions for such a programme.

12. We have not made any bones about our view that substantial progress must be made in the issue of the decommissioning of arms. Towards a Negotiated Settlement 2 helpfully gave us some further clarification on the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA. The Government accepts that Sinn Fein is an organisation distinct from the IRA, but the issue of its relationship with the IRA and its attitude to the use of violence requires additional clarification. For example, Sinn Fein has in the past accepted the IRA's armed struggle as legitimate. Does it remain your position, or if not, are there circumstances in which it could be so again?

13. We contend that the best demonstration that the peace we are currently enjoying is lasting and that the republican movement is fully committed to exclusively democratic methods would be to make progress in this area. We do not, as your paper suggests, assert that the continuation of this exploratory dialogue is dependent on the disposal of weapons. But, as we explained in paragraph 3, the question must be addressed, as one of a number of important issues, and substantial progress made during the course of this dialogue, Sinn Fein has said that it wants the removal of the gun from Irish politics at the earliest opportunity. What part do you believe Sinn Fein itself can play in achieving this? What are your practical proposals?

#### Summary of questions

14. In the course of this response we have put a number of questions to you and it may be helpful to summarise them here:



We believe that you recognise that Northern Ireland has a deeply divided community, characterised by traditions and identities which extend beyond Northern Ireland itself to the rest of the island of Ireland and to the rest of the United Kingdom. Is that your view?

It appears from Towards a Negotiated Settlement 2 that you suggest failure to reach an acceptable political settlement will inevitably result in conflict. Acceptable to whom?

Would it be correct to interpret you as seeking to insist only on an outcome which involves an end to Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom regardless of the wishes of a majority of its people?

If the inclusive negotiations were to produce an agreement and that outcome was put, as the Prime Minister has said it will be, to the people in a referendum and broadly endorsed by them, what would Sinn Fein's reaction be?

Would Sinn Fein accept the democratic decision of the people?

We note also that in its 1992 document Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland Sinn Fein said that the Irish people have a right to political structures which are capable of sustaining peace - making peace permanent. What sort of structures do you foresee fitting that requirement?

What is Sinn Fein's view on the format for talks?

Sinn Fein has in the past accepted the IRA's armed struggle as legitimate. Does it remain your position, or if not, are there circumstances in which it could be so again?

Sinn Fein has said that it wants the removal of the gun from Irish politics at the earliest opportunity. What part do you believe Sinn Fein itself can play in achieving this? What are your practical proposals?

Our common purpose

15. We should like to remind you of our opening statement where we said we look forward in this dialogue not to the anticipation of the political negotiations that form part of the talks process, but to a sustained and productive exploration of the issues. We have a duty to all those we represent to pursue this task and, as you put it, to leave the divisions and mistrust of the past behind us.

16. To this end, we have proposals to make for a draft programme of work upon which we would welcome your views.



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PROPOSED WORKPLAN FOR FURTHER MEETINGS

Meeting 1	Sinn Fein's views on the ground rules for an inclusive political talks process
Meeting 2	Prisons issues
Meeting 3	Social and economic issues, including parity of esteem, the Irish language etc
Meeting 4	Practical consequences of violence, including how best to secure progress on decommissioning of arms
Meeting 5	Policing and other criminal justice issues.

This workplan is purely for guidance and as an indication of the subjects each side would wish to address. It is not intended as a straitjacket, but as a flexible plan which can be adapted as the dialogue progresses. Some issues might require consideration at more than one meeting, or would need to be returned to later in the dialogue. Other issues not mentioned above might arise and need to be added. Any urgent issue could be addressed at any meeting.

As stated in the Government's opening statement, the Government side would be happy to explain and clarify its position on all these issues. It would welcome contributions from Sinn Fein on all of them and looks forward to a serious and constructive exploration of these issues.

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TOWARDS A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT 3

In our opening statement to you, we outlined our view that democratic, political and practical imperatives require the open involvement and inclusion of all political views if a democratic resolution to the conflict is to be sought and achieved. Democratic reasons clearly determine that Sinn Féin's right to represent its electorate and to promote its analysis should be accepted and acted upon immediately and publicly. This is the basis upon which we entered into dialogue.

Sinn Féin has consistently stated, over a protracted period, that we seek a complete demilitarisation of the situation; that we seek the removal forever of all guns - British, unionist, loyalist and republican - from Irish politics.

Everyone has an influence over the present situation. The collective application of that influence can transform the political climate and put an end to the failures of the past.

Only a lasting peace settlement will achieve this and a peace settlement must include the permanent removal of all guns from Irish politics.

The evidence of our sad and tragic history wholly supports that. That is the logic of a peace process.

This is our third meeting with you. It is our opinion that the talks process can and should now move into all party peace talks, led by both governments, as the necessary next stage in the negotiation of a real and lasting political settlement in Ireland. We believe that this opinion is shared by an overwhelming majority of people on these islands and people of goodwill towards the Irish and British peoples in the international community.

The initiative taken by the IRA and the potential that initiative provides to transform Irish society has been universally recognised and welcomed. The Irish and US Governments have already responded positively. The British Government, however has the central role to play in turning the potential for a lasting settlement into a reality. We believe that the British Government has a political and moral responsibility to move us all into the next phase of the peace process.



Sinn Féin wishes to see a lasting settlement based on democratic principles. In our view this requires that your government ends its involvement in Irish affairs (an involvement which has had destructive and painful consequences for both our peoples) and returns to the Irish people our right to national self-determination. These core political issues are the task of inclusive negotiations.

Inclusive dialogue and negotiations are, therefore, necessary and inevitable if this conflict is to be resolved on a democratic basis. Pre-conditions represent obstacles to peace. They are a distraction from and a barrier to the necessary negotiation.

Inclusive negotiations, without vetoes or preconditions should begin immediately. Sinn Féin, as a democratically mandated political party, must be involved fully in these negotiations.

It is, of course, essential, in this context, that Sinn Féin and our voters are immediately accorded equality of treatment.

In addition we are convinced that the political climate would be significantly improved if your government responded positively to the need for a demilitarisation of the situation. You need to show that you are committed to the peace process. The announcement on Thursday 12th January of a curtailment of British Army operations in Belfast is a welcome step in that direction. We are concerned, however, that British military operations, including the activities of the RUC, have continued unchanged in some areas. In fact, in some areas, most noticeably South Armagh, the actions of your military forces have been increased. A complete end to British military operations and the speedy release of all political prisoners, for example, would greatly assist the peace process. While such issues are not, and should not be, preconditions to inclusive dialogue, we would again urge you to address them as a matter of urgency.

The most urgent task facing the people of Ireland and Britain is to advance the peace process setting democracy, equality, justice and political stability as its clear objectives. Dialogue and all-embracing negotiations in the context of democratic principles must be the means to that end.

Sinn Féin is fully committed to that position. This was underlined publicly by the Sinn Féin President, Gerry Adams, in a joint statement, issued with the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds and the SDLP leader John

Hume on 6th September 1994, which stated:

"We are at the beginning of a new era in which we are totally committed to democratic and peaceful methods of resolving our political problems. We reiterate that our objective is an equitable and lasting agreement that can command the allegiance of all".

In attempting to progress towards that position republicans have consistently demonstrated a willingness to be reasonable and flexible. We are convinced that if the political will exists that we can finally remove the causes of conflict through the achievement of a democratic political settlement. We now have an unprecedented opportunity to build a lasting peace. The effective application for the first time of democratic principles, and the achievement of a political settlement on this basis, is the only way to permanently remove conflict. The potentially historic opportunity which currently exists cannot be lost.

We feel that the issues raised by us in this meeting and at our two previous meetings deserve direct and open responses. In the document which we presented to you at our second meeting on 19th December we asked you the following questions;

1. When do you intend to initiate, with the Dublin government, all party talks?
2. What format will these talks follow?
3. How will the various parties to the negotiations, including the British government, be represented?
4. Where will these talks take place?
5. What time-scale do you envisage for these talks?

We anticipate that you will provide us with answers to these questions at today's meeting.

We also wish to deal with your government's stance on the issue of IRA weapons.

Sinn Féin is totally committed to bringing about the complete and permanent removal of all guns from Irish politics. To bring about, in the word of the British government "the decommissioning" of all weapons of war. Without this commitment the peace process would not have been brought to its present position. The most important element in bringing the situation to this point, as is universally



acknowledged, was the IRA's announcement of 31 August 1994. In our view the British government know this.

Attempts, therefore, to link the issue of the IRA's weapons to your continued refusal to recognise the rights of the Sinn Féin electorate are disingenious. We are concerned, therefore, that the British government's position on the decommissioning of IRA weapons is, at best, a stalling tactic, at worst an attempt to create a situation of crisis in the peace process around the issue. This must be avoided. Our position on this matter is transparent. We wish to use our influence on all matters, in a positive way and with the aim of advancing the peace process. How we use our influence and how much influence we have is a matter of judgement for us.

Be assured of our committment but be assured also that efforts by you to subvert the integrity of Sinn Féin's position on the rights of our electorate as a pretext for stalling the peace process will serve only to undermine and subvert the peace process itself.

Furthermore, given the public statements made by British Government ministers over the past weeks we would additionally ask you to answer the following questions;

6. Is it the British government's position that the decommissioning of IRA weapons is a precondition to Sinn Féin's involvement in all party negotiations?
7. Is it the British government's position that, unless this issue is dealt with to your satisfaction, that we cannot move to inclusive peace talks and that, consequently, the peace process is at an end?

The British government has said that other political parties will not agree to Sinn Féin's participation in the negotiation process until the decommissioning of IRA weapons has occurred. In real terms this means that the unionist parties are now being given a veto over Sinn Féin's participation in inclusive peace talks.

8. Is it, therefore, the British government's position that other political parties can exercise a veto over Sinn Féin's involvement in all party negotiations?

16 January 1995

MINISTERIAL MEETINGS WITH SINN FEIN

Speaking note

1. You have asked at earlier meetings when Ministers will meet Sinn Fein. We understand your concern both to establish dialogue at the highest political level, and to be treated on a basis of parity of esteem with other political parties.
2. The Government wants Sinn Fein to be able to play the same part as the other main political parties in the public life of Northern Ireland. An important objective of this dialogue, from the Government's point of view, is to achieve that transition.
3. As you know, it has for a long time been Ministers' policy that they will not receive Council delegations which include Sinn Fein councillors. They have applied the same policy to certain loyalist parties.
4. Ministers have now changed this policy. When, in future, a district council asks to send a cross party deputation to meet a Minister, the decision on whether or not to agree to the request will be taken solely on the merits of the request, without reference to the composition of the deputation in terms of the parties that would be represented on it. Ministers will therefore meet Sinn Fein councillors, as part of cross-party council delegations.
5. As to this dialogue, we have said that Ministers will judge when to participate themselves. I should like to explain a little more fully what I expect their approach will be.
6. Ministers recognise that, if this dialogue is to be successful, then active Ministerial involvement at the right time will be



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necessary. They look forward to this. A successful dialogue is likely to involve both a series of detailed exchanges with officials and a number of meetings with Ministers to address fundamental issues of policy.

7. As to when Ministers will become involved, they will want to decide this in the light of progress. Two considerations are likely to be particularly important.
8. First, they will want to see if both sides accept that all the necessary issues can and will be addressed over the course of the dialogue. They will be prepared, as are we, to address the issues you think are important. They will want to know whether you, in turn, will be prepared to cooperate in ensuring the issues Ministers think are important are also addressed.
9. Second, they will wish to see if progress has been made in these meetings in having a serious and substantive exploration across the key issues. They do not expect that these key issues will necessarily have been fully covered before they become involved. Indeed, on some important issues, Ministers see their own involvement at the right time as crucial to achieving the successful outcome they seek. But they will be discouraged from thinking their involvement will help if we cannot even report that we have discussed and begun to make progress on the key issues.
10. As you know, we have proposals for a workplan which sets out what they key issues might be, and how we might address them in coming meetings.
11. For our part, we are ready to engage in intensive discussions, at whatever pace both sides find useful, to enable us to reach as soon as possible the point where Ministers judge they should become involved.

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ANNEX D

PRESS LINE

Useful and constructive meeting. Each side exchanged papers offering further responses to their opening statements. Each side agreed to consider the issues raised in these responses further.

Sinn Fein welcomed the recent decision on army patrols in Belfast though pressed for faster progress and raised some individual incidents of concern.

British Government proposed a workplan covering a wide range of issues which might be addressed in future meetings. It thinks that discussion on a broad range of issues, would best help to create the right climate for inclusive political talks, itself believing that the critical point is that no issue regarded as important by either side should be excluded from the dialogue. It welcomed Sinn Fein's commitment to use its influence on all matters in a positive way.

There was also discussion of some issues concerning prisons, Irish language, economic matters and ground rules for the Talks process, on which both sides sought views from the other. The Government side expressed its concerns about punishment beatings and Sinn Fein explained that they had made clear publicly their disapproval of such assaults.

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