

EXPLORATORY DIALOGUE

15 December 1994

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE GOVERNMENTIntroduction

1. The Government's priority in Northern Ireland is to help achieve peace, stability, reconciliation and prosperity for all the people of Northern Ireland, and to establish locally accountable democratic institutions carrying widespread support and acceptance within a wider framework of harmonious relations based on consent.

2. For the last 25 years, all sections of the community have endured violence and immeasurable human suffering. They have overwhelmingly rejected such violence and supported the principles of democracy and consent, as set out in the Downing Street Declaration.

3. That Declaration offered a framework for a better future and set out a clear path by which the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), and others, could come to play a full part in democratic life. There had first to be an assurance that violence was at an end. The statement by the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) on 12 October, as progressively confirmed in subsequent actions, has made it possible for the Government to open this exploratory dialogue now as the next step in the process.

4. It is through this dialogue that peace can be consolidated and loyalist political representatives can demonstrate their commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and the democratic process, and so take the opportunity offered by the Downing Street Declaration to enter as fully into normal political life as is consistent with their electoral mandates. It is therefore of critical importance. Senior Government officials, acting under Ministerial direction, are entering these exploratory discussions with the utmost seriousness and in a positive spirit with a commitment to bringing them, if possible, to a successful and satisfactory conclusion.

Basis of Exploratory Dialogue

5. The Government is entering this exploratory dialogue with the following purposes:

- to exchange views on how the PUP and UDP would be able over a period to play the same part as the current constitutional parties in the public life of Northern Ireland; and
- to examine the practical consequences of the ending of violence.

6. As the British and Irish Governments reiterated in the Downing Street Declaration, the achievement of peace must involve a permanent end to the use of, or support for, paramilitary violence. The continuation and completion of this dialogue depends on the CLMC's continued adherence to this in word and action regardless of other circumstances and on loyalist political representatives demonstrating a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and showing that they abide by the democratic process. One of the clearest demonstrations of adherence to these principles will be the safe removal and disposal of illegally-held weapons and explosives. Also important will be clarification of the PUP's and UDP's attitude to the use of violence in any circumstances, and of their relationship to the CLMC.

7. The Government recognises that the PUP and UDP each have elected representatives and that, in the communities they represent, they reflect the interests and aspirations of many of their constituents. But at present neither party has demonstrated a significant electoral mandate across Northern Ireland as a whole. The Government wishes both parties and their elected representatives to play as full a part in normal political life as is consistent with their electoral mandates, but that will only be possible if, over the period of these exploratory discussions, the Government and

other political parties can come to be satisfied of the PUP's and UDP's abiding commitment in both word and deed to exclusively peaceful methods, and to the democratic process. In these circumstances, as far as the Government is concerned, the PUP and UDP would be free to participate fully in democratic politics, but such participation would have to reflect the size of their electoral mandates and be consistent with the treatment of other parties with similar mandates. On this basis, the Government would in due course be prepared to join in bilateral dialogue with their elected representatives on the way ahead for Northern Ireland.

Principle of consent

8. The Government's fundamental approach to the future of Northern Ireland is based on the right of self-determination and the principle of democratic consent, as set out in paragraph 4 of the Downing Street Declaration. The Government reaffirms all its commitments in that Declaration, together with its obligations under international agreements and the guarantees which it has given, including Northern Ireland's statutory constitutional guarantee.

9. The Government welcomes the parallel commitments on behalf of the Irish Government to these principles in paragraph 5 of the Downing Street Declaration. It believes these principles have the support of people throughout both parts of the island of Ireland.

Political and social realities in Northern Ireland

10. In accordance with these principles, it is the present wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom in domestic and international law. The Government is accordingly the lawful and democratically-constituted governing authority in Northern Ireland. There is also a set of geographical, historical and political realities which give the Government of the Republic of Ireland an interest in relevant Northern Ireland issues as acknowledged in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

11. 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. Northern Ireland has suffered from an absence of agreement on political arrangements which would allow representatives from all main parts of the community to play a full and effective part in the political life of the region.

12. The larger part of the population of Northern Ireland retains a strong sense of loyalty to the Crown, believing that its culture and ethos can best be preserved if Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom. The minority community, in general, sees itself as Irish. Politically, many in that community aspire to the achievement of a sovereign, territorially united Ireland.

13. The Government acknowledges a responsibility to all the people of Northern Ireland to provide security, stability and good government in general. It is committed to the establishment of a society in which all may live in peace, free from discrimination and intolerance, and with the opportunity for members of all sections of the community to participate fully in the structures and processes of government on the basis of parity of esteem.

14. So far as legislation and Government policies are concerned, most - if not all - sources of inequality between the two main parts of the community have now been removed. Intensive efforts have been and are being made to tackle the residual problems of inequality, and to target the areas of greatest social need, wherever they occur. But there remain substantial social and economic inequalities. These further exacerbate intercommunal divisions and reduce the extent to which certain parts of the minority community consider they are treated fairly in Northern Ireland. At the same time, there is evidence of alienation from Government in parts of the majority community on the grounds that the Government are alleged to pay insufficient concern to their legitimate interests and aspirations. These factors may also contribute to the readiness of small minorities, in different parts of the wider community, to resort to terrorism in pursuit of their political goals.

15. Terrorism in support of, and terrorism in opposition to, a change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland has done great damage and inflicted immeasurable human suffering - although it has been steadfastly resisted by an overwhelming number of the people of Northern Ireland. More particularly, it has rendered the search for a just and lasting political settlement, as well as the achievement of economic prosperity, far more difficult. It has also made necessary the substantial commitment of the armed forces in support of the police.

16. The Government totally rejects any attempt to promote political objectives by violence or the threat of violence. It is absolutely committed to the achievement of political goals by exclusively peaceful and democratic means. But it also recognises that Northern Ireland's various community, security and social and economic problems tend to reinforce each other in a way which makes their solution, both individually and collectively, more difficult. Given this intimate and inseparable connection between Northern Ireland's political, security and economic and social problems, the Government recognises the need to tackle all these deep seated problems together.

17. The Government, upholding as it does the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, this being the undoubted wish of most people who live there, also recognises a unique relationship between the peoples of the United Kingdom as a whole and of the Republic of Ireland. The Government is, therefore, firmly committed to the enhancement of that relationship and to continuing close contact, consultation and co-operation on matters of shared concern.

18. It also recognises that the history of these two islands is closely connected, with both uplifting and tragic episodes. No one has a monopoly on suffering. All sides have matters to regret. There is a need for a healing process through genuine reconciliation and dialogue between the various sections of the community, based on mutual recognition and acceptance of each other's rights.

The aims of the British Government in Northern Ireland

19. It is against this background that the Government has been seeking to achieve the goal described in paragraph 1 above. More particularly, it is attempting to do so by:

- promoting the attainment of agreement amongst all the people who live in the island of Ireland, and working together with the Irish Government to that end;
- undertaking a co-ordinated and coherent approach to all aspects of Government policy in Northern Ireland, recognising that the fundamental political, security and economic and social problems of the region are closely interrelated; and
- pursuing policies informed by the principles of equality of opportunity, equity of treatment and parity of esteem irrespective of political, cultural or religious affiliation or gender.

20. The remainder of this statement sets out the more detailed implications of the preceding statements of the Government's objectives, and the principles and analysis on which they are based.

Government policies - a summary

21. In respect of law and order, it will remain the Government's policy to:

- deal with all types of crime, including terrorist crime, by the vigorous and impartial enforcement of the criminal law by the police;
- secure the removal of all illegally-held guns and explosives;

- prevent any individual or organisation from usurping the functions of the police by taking the law into their own hands;
- move as rapidly as circumstances permit to exclusively civilian policing in ways acceptable to the whole community;
- continue to act imaginatively, in conjunction with the police and the armed forces and without lowering their guard prematurely, in its responses to the terrorist threat as and when that threat diminishes;
- maintain a secure but humane prison system in which convicted prisoners serve their sentences in accordance with the law.

22. In terms of social policy, the Government will continue to:

- seek to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of political opinion or religious belief in both the public and private sectors;
- secure the further protection of the human, civil, political, social and cultural rights of all members of the community in Northern Ireland;
- pursue action programmes targeted at the areas of greatest social and economic deprivation in Northern Ireland.

23. The Government's objectives in the field of economic policy include:

- the promotion of economic growth through increased competitiveness, from which it seeks both more jobs and a reduction in unemployment;

- a fair distribution of jobs throughout Northern Ireland;
- the provision of education and training facilities designed to maximise the welfare and life chances of members of all sections of the community; and,
- maximising the benefits to Northern Ireland of the UK's membership of the European Union.

24. The Government expects that exploratory dialogue will provide the opportunity, in terms of the purposes of the discussions set out in paragraph 5, to clarify and explain Government policy in any of the above areas with a view to helping bring the dialogue to a successful conclusion.

25. The Government expects, in particular, when discussing the practical consequences of ending violence, to examine at an early stage how all illegal weapons and explosives are going to be removed from life in Northern Ireland. Their safe disposal will provide convincing evidence of a permanent end to the use of violence and of commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and the democratic process. Their continued retention will call such commitments into question and will constitute a barrier to the PUP and UDP playing as full a part in normal political life as is consistent with their electoral mandates.

The Talks Process

26. It remains the Government's belief that all the most fundamental issues facing Northern Ireland can be most satisfactorily addressed and resolved through inclusive political negotiations addressing a broad agenda across all the relevant relationships with no issue excluded and no outcome predetermined. Participation in such a Talks process, involving the two Governments and other political parties, is open (as paragraph 10 of the Downing Street Declaration makes clear) to "democratically mandated parties

which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process". Neither the PUP nor the UDP currently command a sufficient electoral mandate across Northern Ireland, comparable to that of the other political parties already involved in the Talks process, to secure formal participation in such a Talks process. However, the Government would want to keep the PUP and UDP, along with other parties who had demonstrated a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods but were not formally involved in the Talks process, in touch at the appropriate level with its general thinking and in broad terms with the development of political dialogue, and to take account of their views.

27. Exploratory dialogue cannot anticipate any part of the negotiations that constitute the Talks process. But, with a view to exploring how the PUP and UDP might come to be kept in touch in broad terms with and contribute to the development of political dialogue through the Talks process, the Government believes it would be helpful to set out its approach to the Talks process.

28. In brief, through the Talks process, the Government is seeking a stable, durable and workable political settlement which secures widespread consent across the community in Northern Ireland.

29. In the Talks process the two Governments are therefore, as announced in the House of Commons on 26 March 1991,

" setting out to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands ... In order to ensure a full airing of the issues, it will be open to each of the parties to raise any aspect of these relationships, including constitutional issues, or any other matter which it considers relevant.... It is accepted by all the parties that nothing will be finally agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole ... in the final analysis, the outcome will need to be acceptable to the people".

(Hansard 26 March 1991 Col 765-6)

30. Those "ground rules" remain the basis for the political talks, and were agreed between the British and Irish Governments and the main Northern Ireland constitutional parties in 1991. Even though the Government accepts that there might be modifications in the format of future multi-lateral talks, if that is what the participants want, the principles set out in the 26 March 1991 Statement remain so far unchallenged, and the Government in particular remains committed to them. In the view of the Government, the Downing Street Declaration also complements and underpins the Talks process and the search for a comprehensive political settlement. And as the Prime Minister made clear on 16 September, the final outcome of the Talks process will be submitted to the electorate in Northern Ireland for approval in a referendum.

31. Although agreement in principle had not been reached by the end of the period set aside for multi-lateral talks in November 1992, virtually all the key issues between the parties participating, including the Irish Government, had been touched on in greater or lesser detail, while the Talks process itself has continued ever since. Within Northern Ireland there have, for example, been intensive rounds of discussion between Northern Ireland Office Ministers and three of the main Northern Ireland parties to explore the basis for agreement.

32. Of equal importance to the continuing political dialogue in Northern Ireland has been the continuing work by the two Governments in drafting a "Joint Framework Document", designed to embody their shared understanding of the kind of accommodation, in those areas of special concern to both Governments, which might have the best chance of winning the widespread acceptance across the community that it will need if it is to be workable and durable. The British and Irish Governments hope to publish the Document, when complete, not as a blueprint to be imposed by the two Governments, but as a shared assessment to serve as a basis for further discussion.

33. The Joint Framework Document will deal with relations between the two Governments, and their views on the possible development of

relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. As part of its search for an overall settlement, the Government also plans to publish, at the same time as the Joint Framework Document, its own understanding of those local democratic institutions in Northern Ireland which as part of an overall settlement might best secure widespread acceptance, as a basis for public discussion and a guide for further negotiation in the Talks Process.

34. Without in any way anticipating the negotiations that form part of the Talks process, the Government is prepared to explain and clarify its approach to the wider Talks process and how the PUP and UDP can come to be kept in touch in broad terms with and contribute to the development of political dialogue, as well as the relevance of the principles enshrined in the Downing Street Declaration.

The Way Forward

35. The Government looks forward in this exploratory dialogue, not to the anticipation of political negotiations which would form part of the Talks process, but to a sustained and productive exploration of the issues, including those touched on above, all in the context of the purposes set out in paragraph 5.

36. The Government remains firmly of the view, also set out in the Downing Street Declaration, that this can be achieved in ways that compromise no position or principle, nor prejudice the future for any section of the people of Ireland, North and South, whatever their tradition.

15 December 1994

PROGRESSIVE UNIONIST PARTY'S OPENING STATEMENT TO BRITISH GOVERNMENT

(Bi-lateral Talks 15 December 1994)

1. Although it has been often stated that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland is secure, it should be clear to all that the indigenous British population have some serious misgivings in relation to proposed cross-border institutions. Those fears are real and should be addressed as soon as is practicably possible by the Government.

The Framework Document - the basis of 'strands 2 and 3'; the suggestions for relationships between the peoples and Governments within the British Isles - should reflect the will of the greater number of people within Northern Ireland.

We echo the sentiment of the Queen's Speech ... "the future of Northern Ireland will be founded in democracy and consent". It has been pleasing to hear that consent is to be the predominant factor and that imposition has no part in our future. This is a realistic approach.

Put simply, without the consent of the greater number of people any initiative is doomed to failure. That, is the right of the people!

2. The Progressive Unionist Party will take a proactive role in seeking to convince our Government of the need to regard the release of political prisoners as being integral to the 'peace process'.

3. It is the contention of the Progressive Unionist Party that there should be a return of power to the people of Northern Ireland. We believe that the form of devolved government to take Northern Ireland into the 21st century is the one of Sharing Responsibility.

We await with great interest the publication of the Government position paper on the internal governance of Northern Ireland.

It is the view of the Progressive Unionist Party that the cementing of a peaceful future can be advanced by the diverse traditions within our society together administering for all of the people in an atmosphere of honour and transparency.

4. We are committed to the transformation of the conflict which has so damaged our community. There is little hope, at least in the short term, of resolving the conflict.

The implacable opposites of Nationalism and Unionism are irreconcilable. However, we believe that movement by all to the legitimate political arena can create the transformation from armed conflict to dialogue.

5. Like all modern western countries, Northern Ireland suffers from a series of difficulties in relation to policing.

It will be our intention, during successive meetings with Government representatives, to bring forth our policy on policing this divided society.

It seems reasonable to us that consideration should be given to various aspects of a very contentious issue. That the police should be used a political football is not to anyone's advantage.

Such an emotive issue must be dealt with in a sensitive and wholly realistic manner. No section of our community should be left out of the debate which will undoubtedly take place. That includes the police as well.

We should be mindful that those who serve in the ranks of the RUC are employees. They too have rights. Serving officers and their families constitute a substantial section of our community. They too are Ulstermen and Ulsterwomen who have as much invested in the future as anyone else. They too have suffered terribly during the

past twenty-four years and long for peace as much as their fellow citizenry.

6. The issue of illegal arms in our society cannot and will not be dismissed lightly. Ideally we wish that none existed at all. Alas, we are all too well aware that this is not the case because of the distrust which exists.

The formula necessary to create disarmament will indeed be hard to find. We are committed to the search for that formula. As with all who address the contentious issues which so beset us, we too are bound by the realms of possibility. Hence, we fear that the resolution of this issue is some way down the road.

7. Working class areas in Northern Ireland have suffered most from the collapse of Belfast's economic base. The demise of linen/textiles and the contraction of shipbuilding and engineering have impacted on employment opportunities particularly in Protestant communities. Within one generation structural unemployment has been established, leading to severe community dislocation.

Unemployment stands officially at over 30% in working class areas, rising to over 60% on large housing estates. This is compounded by a poorly qualified population (85% of 16 years + have no formal education/training qualifications in the Greater Shankill and 70% leave school at 16 years old).

Government initiatives have made little impact on the problem. From 1986/89 the Industrial Development Board (IDB) only promoted 220 jobs in all of North and West Belfast. Only 7% of jobs created by the IDB last year were in Belfast.

KEY OBJECTIVE

To increase employment opportunities in disadvantaged areas and to enhance the employability of people in those areas.

KEY CONCEPT

To create the momentum for community regeneration through a multiple strategy approach to employment.

PROGRESSIVE UNIONIST PARTY'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY

The multiple strategy approach for disadvantaged areas should be in short, medium and long term goals, across the following sectors:

- selective intervention to retain and expand the indigenous economic base of Northern Ireland based companies;
- target setting for inward investment by the IDB and encouragement of companies to disadvantaged areas, particularly in Belfast;
- risk support for entrepreneurial development;
- creation in the medium term of a community based social economy, with jobs of added community value, matched to local social need, ie parent support teams, environment task forces, sports development, community care;
- establishment of local capital finance fund;
- effective quality training programme;
- the newly announced community employment programme (extended ACE) should pay proper wages and be for genuinely innovative programmes.

8. The European Union, through President Jacque Delors, has committed £230 million additional money to help reconstruct the economy and society in Northern Ireland.

This will only be successfully achieved if the finance is funnelled directly to disadvantaged communities. At present the Government has no clear idea on how to do this.

It is evident that statutory bodies (T&EA, LEDU, Sports Council, NI Tourist Board) are lining up to seize a share. Money will be ring fenced for disadvantaged areas but the EU does not have the capacity to deal directly with local groups on the ground.

The best mechanism, in terms of Belfast's disadvantaged areas, would be to channel the money to Making Belfast Work but with a proviso that MBW should channel the money directly to local areas and not through statutory agencies, who would be likely to use it as top-up for their own projects or only distribute in line with their own policy.

In contrast MBW is the only Government body which is flexible and knows the situation on the ground. This should be replicated in rural areas to ensure parity of esteem.

We recognise the difficulties along the road in the transition to the democratic process. We intend to address all contentious issues head-on. The party hopes that all other groupings involved would reciprocate.

ULSTER DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Opening Statement

Today represents an historic step towards a resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland. We see this as the first step in the democratisation of Northern Ireland and its position in the United Kingdom. It is our goal to remove the internal and external causes of instability in Northern Ireland, which will mean not only making demands of others but of ourselves. The Ulster Democratic Party has always been dedicated to creating the conditions whereby the people of Northern Ireland could share responsibility of citizenship, both within Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. Everyone must enter this process with courage and imagination. It is incumbent on all parties to play a full and constructive role in the pursuit of peace. Whatever our aspirations for the future, whatever our backgrounds, no one has the right to deny our people, especially our children, of the best possible life-chances. The Ulster Democratic Party enter these preliminary discussions in a confident and realistic manner, with the interests of Northern Ireland and its people, first and foremost in our mind. We recognise the difficulties which lie ahead. Nothing can be guaranteed. Creating the peace has been difficult: cementing that peace will prove infinitely more challenging. But a basis for agreement must be reached. This may be the last opportunity to build a peaceful society together. We must co-determine the future of Northern Ireland, building accountable, democratic structures based upon respect and equality of citizenship. The scars inflicted from centuries of distrust and twenty five years of conflict will not disappear overnight. It would be naive to believe otherwise, but we look forward to a future where there are no victims of conflict and political prisoners form part of a distant memory.

ULSTER DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Submission to preliminary discussions with Northern Ireland Office

15 December 1994

The UDP welcomes the development of this political initiative which in our opinion, provides the best opportunity for the two traditions in Northern Ireland to build a new and exciting future on the basis of co-determination and equality of citizenship. We all share a responsibility for the failings of the past 25 years, and must share the responsibility to find a resolution of the conflict. The UDP are committed to be positive and constructive in its approach to the political process.

Loyalists have consistently been progressive and dynamic in their pursuit of peace. This was evidenced by the historic contribution made by the Combined Loyalist Military Command temporary ceasefire in 1991 to facilitate interparty talks. Most significantly the ceasefire announced on 13 October 1994 has facilitated the movement necessary to advance the process to its present position.

We call for the establishment of an elected assembly in Northern Ireland as soon as possible. The political vacuum which perpetuates instability must be filled with democratic and accountable structures.

In the interests of all the citizens of Northern Ireland the British Government should establish a commission to formulate a Bill of Rights or alternatively incorporate the European Convention on human rights into Northern Ireland law.

The people of Northern Ireland must have equality of citizenship within the United Kingdom. The British government should as soon as possible address the political apartheid which exists between the citizens of Northern Ireland and mainland Britain. The people of Northern Ireland are currently mere step-citizens of the UK because

they are denied their basic democratic right to fully participate in state elections because of discrimination by the Labour and Liberal Democratic Parties. This infringement goes beyond the prejudice of political parties and goes to the heart of democratic politics in this state and as such it is a matter which must be addressed by Government.

All sides bear a responsibility to the people of Northern Ireland to play a full and equal role in the process. No party should be excluded or indeed exclude themselves from the opportunities afforded by dialogue and agreement. The outcome of dialogue, within the realms of consent, lies firmly and solely in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland.

A quarter century of confrontation has accentuated the fears and distrust between the two traditions. Therefore we must create a modern democratic framework of government for NI which incorporates the safeguards and guarantees necessary to command widespread cross-community support (such as proposed in the COMMONSENSE document). Unionism has a responsibility to convince nationalists that their best future lies within a new and progressive Northern Ireland where no one is denied their rights or aspirations.

It is incumbent on all parties to be constructive and realistic in their approach to dialogue. Agreement must be reached. If after reasonable time consensus can not be found, the British Government who hold the prime responsibility for good government, should take the initiative by putting their proposals along with the Anglo-Irish Agreement to referendum. Subsequent elections should then be called to a NI constitutional conference, and the British Government engage international pressure for the Republic of Ireland to remove its illegal and immoral claim over NI.

Twenty five years of conflict has resulted in widespread social and economic deprivation within working class areas in both communities. Economic regeneration is an essential component of conflict resolution and social reconstruction. It is important that

a structured programme be engaged which can demonstrate accountability and parity of investment. Regardless of supplementary investment from whatever source the British Government must make a firm long term commitment to at least maintain its current level of subvention to Northern Ireland.

There must be an equal commitment from all sides to the 'normalisation' of society. In order to redress the abnormalities which have been created by twenty five years of conflict and political instability, we must aid the transition from war to peace by addressing issues such as policing in the community and the removal of special legislation. Of vital importance is the release of political prisoners and their reintegration into society.

Any relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic can only be built upon trust, mutual agreement and respect. North South cooperation can be important and of common benefit but cannot become a cornerstone of any settlement. Any cooperation must not become part of the NI constitution, but exist on the same basis as cooperation between other neighbouring EC countries.