

Mrs McKibbin ^{since 2005}

pl note the Walker's request Mrs Kenny
that this be filed carefully D 26/5 2375 Mrs John

EXPLORATORY DIALOGUE - 24 MAY 1995

This is the statement made
in form by the minute to Sinn
Fein yesterday. Pl. file carefully
careats in it cd. prove important
Mrs I hope unnecessary. Ho

MICHAEL ANCRAM'S OPENING STATEMENT

As we move further in the Ministerial stage of exploratory dialogue, we have already made considerable progress in getting to understand each others' positions. More remains to be done, but perhaps the key issue facing us now is that of confidence in the peace process.

As you know, it is our clear understanding that decommissioning remains of prime importance in this context. We have already provided a paper, and look forward to discussing it at a future meeting.

But in order to look forward and start building a new beginning for Northern Ireland, it is also necessary to come to terms with the past. As Gerry Adams said in his speech at the 1995 Ard Fheis, we need a "healing process" to overcome the wounds of the past. In that context we must restate our abhorrence at the continuation of punishment beatings and other intimidation.

You will undoubtedly seen the considerable press interest there has been recently about Northern Ireland's "disappeared", those believed to be the victims of paramilitary groups whose bodies have never been found. It is clearly both a Christian duty and a matter of simple humanity to allow families knowledge of the fate and access to the bodies of their lost ones. This would allow them to begin the process of coming to terms with their loss, as well as removing an enduring shadow over public life in Northern Ireland. I hope you will use any influence you have to ensure this comes about. It would also be a significant step in the building of bridges of trust and confidence.

As for today, I thought it would be useful if this, the seventh meeting of exploratory dialogue, covered a couple of issues of particular concern to Sinn Fein, namely political development and prisons. The main purpose of this meeting is for us to listen to

your comments and concerns, and set out the Government's position. It would also be useful to hear if you have any other issues you wish to raise.

As we have frequently made clear, we do not regard this as a single issue dialogue. We know and understand that you need to demonstrate progress on the issues that matter to you. Equally, we need to be able to show that progress is being made on issues of importance to us. In these circumstances, parallel progress across a wide range of issues, some of interest to you, some to us, is the key. This is not a matter of bargaining movement on one issue for movement on another. This would not be acceptable for either of us.

Parallel progress is about both sides building confidence and creating an atmosphere in which things become possible which were not so before. The reduction in security force activity since the IRA's cessation of violence was not a deal in return for the IRA's announcement. But this cessation did create an environment in which these sort of developments became possible for the first time.

You recognised the importance of creating the right atmosphere in your opening statement to the last meeting, when you said that the political climate "would be significantly improved" if the Government took action on what you term "demilitarisation". Similarly, we have pointed to the progress which could follow from movement on your part on decommissioning, in particular the move to substantive political dialogue with us.

The way forward on these and the other key issues is parallel progress. But if either of us insists on seeing movement only in terms of victory and surrender, demanding that the other side move while we make no move at all, the whole process could grind to a halt.

Exploratory dialogue can help here. It is not an attempt to exclude you, but rather a way of finding ways to include you in substantive talks. As you know, it is our view that we cannot progress to inclusive round table talks with Sinn Fein's participation without

substantial progress on decommissioning. But by covering a wide range of issues on an open agenda, it gives both sides an opportunity to explore matters of mutual concern, and discuss how confidence in the progress can best be fostered.

At the last meeting, I mentioned another concrete example of parallel progress in action, namely the decision to allow requests for Ministerial and official meetings outside XD to be considered on their merits".

I have here a letter from me to Mr McGuinness, which sets out the revised policy in more detail.

Finally, I would like to turn to the issue of Conway Mill and the "Hurd Policy", which you have raised on several occasions.

I am pleased to be able to confirm that the Secretary of State has decided that assistance need no longer be withheld from groups operating in or out of Conway Mill. He has taken this decision in light of the changed circumstances and continuing developments since the ceasefire declaration. Applications for assistance from groups in the Conway Mill will ~~normally~~ in future, be assessed by the various funding agencies in accordance with their normal assessment procedures.

Essentially, therefore, the Secretary of State has decided to set aside the King statement of 1989 but the Hurd Policy will still remain available to him, although it is kept under active review and I would remind you that it has, in fact, been applied only once in the past 3 years.

TALKS/543