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REMARKS BY
SECRETARY OF STATE WARREN CHRISTOPHER
AND
UK SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND SIR PATRICK MAYHEW
PRIOR TO THEIR MEETING

Department of State
Washington, D.C.

SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER: Good morning. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to welcome Sir Patrick Mayhew, the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I'm going to have a good discussion with him of the very historic Joint Framework Document that Prime Minister Major and Irish Prime Minister Mr. Bruton announced on February 22.

I had a meeting -- I believe it was eight days ago, Sir Patrick -- with the Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring, and I emphasized to him at that time, as I will to Sir Patrick today, how much the United States desires to continue to support the Irish and the British governments in their search for peace. Both President Clinton and I have made it clear that we want to do everything we can to encourage peace in Northern Ireland, and it is very high priority of American diplomacy. I want to add my personal congratulations to you, and to all of the parties involved here, for the great advances they've made over the last couple of years.

I know, Sir Patrick, you yourself have worked very tirelessly and very effectively in this cause. The Joint Framework and the related British documents, of course, are not blueprints for action but rather are a basis for negotiation between the parties and their desire to seek a comprehensive settlement. And it's very important to emphasize, as Sir Patrick always does, that they are to be based upon the consent of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland, and not something to be imposed.

We urge all parties to work hard to move forward on the negotiations. We call on them during this period to continue to refrain from violence. And to those who have laid down their arms, including both the IRA and the Loyalists, we ask them to take the next essential step, and that is to move toward disarmament, which is called decommissioning.

Northern Ireland has been blessedly free of violence for the last six months. In that new hopeful climate, the United States is able to assist the parties in moving forward in stronger business, trade, and cultural links than we've had in the past. We'll do our part to try to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland are able to reap the benefits of peace.

In that connection, Sir Patrick and I will certainly be discussing the White House conference on trade and investment, which is going to be held here in May. As you know, this conference is being coordinated at President Clinton's request by former Senator Mitchell, and I think that may play an important role in our common objective toward trying to achieve a continuation of this historic process toward peace.

Well, Sir Patrick, I'm delighted to see you as always, and congratulate you on the progress that's been made.

SECRETARY MAYHEW: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much indeed. It's a delight to be in Washington once more and have the opportunity of meeting with you again. Thank you very much for your generous words; they are greatly appreciated.

Thank you too, for America's staunch support for our work to secure peace on proper principles of democracy, utterly rejecting violence. This is a time for rational hope.

Thank you once more for America's generosity to the International Fund for Ireland, put to such good and closely focused use in Northern Ireland. As you have rightly said, the Joint Framework Document is offered by the Irish and the British governments to the main constitutional parties of Northern Ireland as aid to further talks and negotiations, not as a blueprint. We have the overall objective of a comprehensive settlement based on agreement.

But agreement in a democracy can only come when democratically mandated parties sit down and talk together on equal terms, and that's what we working for -- with the outcome to be put to a referendum in Northern Ireland. In a democracy, parties will not sit down, must not sit down, with another party that implies that if it doesn't get its way, it is going to condone, once again, the return of to violence.

In a democracy that won't do. There is no place for that. Sinn Fein undoubtedly does have a democratic mandate in Northern Ireland. There are a lot less than Mr. Hume's Nationalist Party, the STLP, but it is inextricably linked with the Irish Republican Party, and that army is still in being, still maintains its arsenal, still recruiting, still targeting, still training, still researching improvised weapons.

And not least it is still seeking funds to maintain its operations and it is still carrying out on a greater scale than before the cease-fire brutal punishment beatings in the community. Why, if peace is already permanent?

Mr. Secretary the next essential step, as you have already said, must be to begin the process of decommissioning arms, both IRA and Loyalist. We're absolutely clear that substantial progress on this must be made before Sinn Fein, in particular, can be admitted to substantive talks for an overall settlement.

We are, however, currently holding exploratory talks, both with them and the Loyalist Party, associated with paramilitaries, so that each other's positions can be tested out and better understood.

Sinn Fein want us to raise this dialogue to ministerial level. In judging the right time for that, we have to be clear that Sinn Fein is willing to address all the necessary issues and that progress has been made in having a serious and substantive exploration of them.

We would need to be clear that, if and when they take part, constructive discussion, particularly in achieving substantial progress on the decommissioning of arms, will be facilitated and accelerated by their joining the dialogue.

We look to Sinn Fein to provide the assurance that this is so. Following that, we would need to be clear, for example, that they will join in exploring the various modalities of decommissioning arms. This would include procedures for verification, the need for independent supervision of the destruction of arms, the different methods of decommissioning, and certain practical and legal considerations.

So we will be pressing to achieve three things in conclusion: a willingness in principle to disarm progressively; a common practical understanding of the modalities as to decommissioning -- what it would actually entail -- in order to test the practical arrangements and to demonstrate good faith; the actual decommissioning of some arms as a tangible confidence-building measure and to signal the start of a process.

Mr. Secretary, that's how Sinn Fein can remove their self-imposed disqualification and take their place at the talks table, where a lasting settlement can be negotiated upon equal terms.

SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, do you anticipate that sanctions imposed against Cuba last August will be lifted?

SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER: You know, Sir Patrick you come from a country with a very vigorous press, so I'm sure that you don't regard as discourteous when you make a fine statement and the question comes on Cuba.

Let me answer that by commenting in this way. We continue to operate in the context of the Cuban Democracy Act, which as you know, has two sides to it. First, the maintenance of the embargo against Cuba; there is no present consideration of making any change in that. The second aspect of the Cuban Democracy Act is to encourage communication between the people of Cuba and the people of the United States, and I think we are anxious to promote that side of the act as well.

These matters are being discussed within the government, there are no recommendations before the President at the present time. We'll be considering these matters, but ought to emphasize that our goal here is to try to reach a situation where Cuba, like the other governments in this hemisphere, is a democratic government. If they take steps in that direction or steps toward market reform, we will respond and carefully calibrated way. But at the present time, we are continuing to operate, as we must, in the context of the Cuban Democracy Act which was passed overwhelmingly in Congress, and as I say, which has two sides, both of which we are promoting.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, can you tell us about the Queen's visit? Are you concerned at all about the Queen's security issue?

SECRETARY MAYHEW: I'm not respondent upon any visit that may take place.

QUESTION: Sir, do you think that the Framework Document has managed to detached the Unionist leadership from the Unionist population?

SECRETARY MAYHEW: That was certainly not it's intention, and I don't believe that is the result. I think that there is a real desire to understand what the two governments have in mind -- responding to the request made to them by the political parties to set out their own ideas of what might have a good chance of getting overall support of the settlement. People are very anxious to read that. I think about 150,000 copies have been taken up, and I believe the process is in place, where people are expressing their views, and I believe a very beneficial effect.

QUESTION: Sir Patrick, what brought about this shift in the British Government's position? Previously the British Government believed that all weapons had be handed over to be decommissioned before substantive talks could begin. Now you're talking about some?

SECRETARY MAYHEW: No, that has never been the case. What we have said is that substantial progress must be made in the decommissioning of arms before, so far as we are concerned, the Sinn Fein could admitted to substantial talks about an overall political settlement. Substantial progress has got to be made.

Thank you very much.

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