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Meeting of Taoiseach and Tánaiste with SDLP Delegation,

Government Buildings, Thursday, 26 January, 1995

1. A list of the attendance at the meeting, which lasted for about an hour, is attached.
2. The Taoiseach said that he had been looking forward to hearing the SDLP's concerns and views at this meeting and that he hoped that the Government could have as productive a relationship with the SDLP - if not more so - as its predecessor.
3. Mr. Hume said that the SDLP were looking forward to working with the Taoiseach, as well as the Tánaiste. This was a time of great hope. It was important that all-party talks should begin as soon as possible. Mr. Hume expressed concern at the evident delay on the part of the British: he could not understand what they expected to achieve by this. It would not be easy to reach agreement but at least once talks began it would be possible to work together on the economic front. Mr. Hume referred in this context to co-operation between the Northern Ireland MEPs.
4. Mr. Hume continued that the British Government did not seem to appreciate that the IRA had decided on a ceasefire in the belief that politics was stronger than the gun and that they could achieve more through politics. As matters stood at present, however, Sinn Féin were not integrated into the political system. While the mood on the ground was such that it would be very difficult to return to violence, Mr. Hume felt nevertheless that it was important to move matters on. He suggested that the Forum should set about reaching agreement with the Unionists by drawing up a set of principles and realities (not structures) for submission to the Unionists. The basis for such a submission already existed in the form of the report of the New Ireland Forum.
5. Mr. Mallon said that the Forum had done good work to date and he paid tribute to the Chairperson and Secretariat. He felt that the Forum was now getting to the stage where it should begin to set out principles. The current situation was frightening but it was also exciting. The opportunity was there now to write the script for Northern

Ireland for the whole of the next century, not just in terms of politics but also in the areas of justice and policing. Mr. Mallon said that while he was a pessimist by nature, he believed that the ceasefire would hold. He was also convinced that it was up to the constitutional parties to lead the debate: Sinn Féin would not be able to get anywhere on justice and policing - they were too negative. It was necessary now to see how imaginative we could be. Mr. Mallon added that he had of course the usual reservations - in particular, it was important to ensure that the needs of Nationalists were not filtered through Unionist concerns. Articles 2 and 3 were very close to the bone for Nationalists. Many recognised that there would have to be change but changes to Article 2 in particular could cause great difficulty in the nationalist community as a whole. If you scratched the surface in the Nationalist community, Article 2 emerged as of key of importance. The Government should not seek to reach agreement with the Unionists by trimming the Nationalist position: if a new script was to be written, it must be from a position where Nationalists could breathe politically. The Nationalists were going to have to make a quantum leap on policing and this could only be done in the context of wider political arrangements, which would give them the confidence to move. Mr. Mallon added that the Forum had had a very positive effect on Sinn Féin who were now beginning to realise that they couldn't impose their wishes on the rest of the body politic.

6. Mr. McGrady expressed concern at the constant assurances being given to Unionists by the British Prime Minister etc. - in a situation where the people represented by the SDLP were being given no such assurances. There was a suspicion that deals had been done and this was given weight by the apparent confidence being displayed by Unionist politicians. Mr. McGrady said that he had no confidence in the morality/integrity of British politicians. Against this background, it was essential that there should be no preemption of basic principles in the Framework Document in advance of negotiations with Unionists: we should not sell our wares cheaply.
7. The Tánaiste, in response, commented inter alia that the Government understood Mr. Mallon's point that nationalist realities should not be filtered through a Unionist perspective. He said that the kind of co-operation between the Northern Ireland

MEPs which Mr. Hume had mentioned deserved greater publicity, as it was not sufficiently appreciated by people in the South. He indicated that the Framework Document set out parameters and expressed the hope that the SDLP would find it acceptable. He also echoed the point made by Mr. Mallon about the positive effects on Sinn Féin of participation in the Forum.

8. Mr. Hume said that in talking to British Ministers, the argument should be put that the situation on the Nationalist side had been transformed in that all parties, including Sinn Féin, wanted to reach agreement with the Unionists. However, what was missing was a willingness on the part of the Unionists to reach agreement: all they wanted was to get power back. The points should be made that the basis of any society is agreement and that the proposed referendum was a solid guarantee. Mr. Hume also expressed concern about the game - playing which was currently going on at Westminster.
9. Mr. Mallon expressed concern at the separation of the peace process from the political process and said that he would like to see the emphasis move from the former to the latter. He also recalled that during the debate in the House of Commons on the Joint Declaration there had not been one reference (from the British Government side) to the nationalist community. He urged that the Government should use any influence it had to ensure that this did not happen again, after the publication of the Framework Document. The Tánaiste said that had made this very clear to the Prime Minister after the debate in question.
10. The Taoiseach asked if there was a risk in the Forum attempting to reach agreement on a set of principles etc., as suggested by Mr. Mallon. This might move the debate backwards rather than forwards in that Sinn Féin might be tempted to indulge in ideological argument. Mr. Hume referred to the fact that all the parties in the Dáil were already in agreement on the basic principles as a factor which would prevent this. He added that while some parties might be tempted to up the ante, it might be difficult for them to do this. The Taoiseach expressed concern about the idea of having a debate in the Forum on principles and realities in advance of publication of

the Framework Document. Mr. McGrady cautioned against seeking to reach agreement in the Forum on the Framework Document. Mr. Mallon agreed that it would be wise not to talk about principles and realities until the Framework Document had been published.

11. The Taoiseach referred to the obstacle to all-party talks presented by the question of decommissioning of arms. He said that he understood that Sinn Féin felt that there was going to be a crisis on this issue. Mr. Hume said that this matter must be handled in a sensible way, whereby the arms would be quietly disposed of. There was no way that the IRA was going to go to the British Government and hand over their weapons. The Taoiseach felt that it was a question of finding a formula of words which would satisfy everybody. In a sense the debate was unreal, given the IRA's capacity to manufacture weapons but there was a need nevertheless to find a way of getting over the problem. Mr. McGrady commented that the UUP and DUP had got themselves on a hook on this issue. Mr. Mallon said that he had met the RUC Chief Constable recently and the latter had accepted that the problem was not so much the arms currently held by the IRA but the IRA's manufacturing capacity. The Taoiseach said that this point needed to be brought home to the Unionists.
12. Mr. McGrady said that it was evident that people like Ken Maginnis and Andrew Hunter were regularly being briefed to the effect that the IRA were preparing to recommence operations. Mr. Mallon suggested that this had to do with concerns about loss of overtime in the RUC. The Tánaiste said that this matter could be raised at this meeting later on in the day with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State.
13. Mr. Hume expressed concern that the Unionists continued to be preoccupied with internal politicking and that they were not inclined to come to an agreement with Nationalists. Their tendency was always to be negative. Mr. Mallon said that it was difficult to understand the attitude of Unionists as they stood to gain so much from any agreement - they would regain control of administration; they would benefit from a sea-change in the Nationalist position on policing in active, practical terms; and their constitutional position would be reinforced. By contrast, Nationalists would

gain relatively little - policing changes which would allow people from South Armagh to join the police; the conferral of legitimacy on the Nationalist position; North/South arrangements; and an acceptance that, as of right, the two parts of the island would work together in decision-making.

14. Mr. Hume said that everyone was talking about the Framework Document and the sensitivities of the Unionists. However, the most sensitive issue was in reality that of administration in Northern Ireland and no-one was talking about this. Mr. Hume added that, to this day, Unionists still practised discrimination. He said that the SDLP would be interested in seeing, privately, the British Government's Stand 1 proposals in advance.
15. In the course of discussion on these proposals, Mr. McGrady expressed surprise that the Government had not been consulted about them. The Tánaiste indicated that while we had not been consulted, the SDLP could take it that the British Government were aware of our views.
16. In his closing remarks, the Taoiseach indicated that the Government would be seeking to address both Nationalist and Unionist concerns, with a view to encouraging the British Government to do likewise (rather than concentrating on Unionist concerns). He suggested that the Forum offered a useful opportunity for informal contacts with the SDLP and that greater use might be made of it.

Simon Hume 3.2.15.

ATTENDANCE

Mr. John Bruton, T.D., Taoiseach

Mr. Dick Spring, T.D., Tanáiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr. Paddy Teahon, Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach

Mr. Frank Murray, Secretary to the Government

Mr. Seán Ó Húiginn, Second Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Seán Donlon, Taoiseach's Programme Manager

Mr. Fergus Finlay, Special Adviser and Programme Manager to the Tanáiste

Mr. Simon Hare, Principal Officer, Department of the Taoiseach

Mr. John Hume, MP, MEP, Leader of the SDLP

Mr. Seamus Mallon, MP, Deputy Leader, SDLP

Mr. Eddie McGrady, MP