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25

Aide Memoire

1. The Taoiseach wishes to bring to the attention of the Government recent developments relating to the Northern Ireland situation.
2. The Government has for a number of months been engaged in intensive negotiations with the British Government with the objective of advancing the peace process by politically anchoring the cessation of violence. The two Governments were in general agreement that the way to achieve this objective was through all party talks in round table format. The SDLP and Sinn Féin have for some time been demanding that an early date for the opening of such talks should be announced now.
3. The British Government's starting position, shared by the unionist parties, was that such talks could not be achieved without evidence that the IRA/Sinn Féin were committed in principle to total decommissioning, would enter immediately into constructive discussions on the modalities of decommissioning and would, as an indication of good faith before the commencement of round table talks, make a gesture involving the decommissioning of some weapons.
4. To clear the way for round table talks, the British Government were eventually persuaded (a) to drop their demand for a gesture and (b) to join with the Irish Government in setting up an International Commission with the initial and limited remit of reporting to the two Governments by

mid-November 1995 on whether it had established that a clear commitment existed on the part of the relevant paramilitary organisations to the full and verifiable decommissioning of all illegally held arms in both jurisdictions in the appropriate context and manner.

5. At the same time, the British Government agreed that it would join with the Irish Government in creating conditions so that the round table talks could commence before the end of 1995.
6. These agreements would be reflected as follows in a joint communiqué:

"The two Governments have agreed to work together to create conditions so that all-party talks in round table format aimed at reaching an agreed political settlement based on consent, could commence before the end of 1995. A series of meetings will now be jointly convened by both Governments with all parties to lay the groundwork for these talks.

Both Governments share the aim of creating conditions in which all the relevant parties will attend these talks and will participate on the most constructive possible basis.

The two Governments have agreed to establish an International Decommissioning Commission. This Commission will have the initial and limited remit of reporting to the two Governments by mid-November, 1995, on whether it has established that a clear commitment exists on the part of the relevant paramilitary organisation to the full and verifiable decommissioning of all

illegally held arms in the appropriate context and manner. The two Governments aim to meet again before the end of November, 1995, to agree the appropriate way forward".

7. Thus Sinn Féin's two main requirements viz drop the demand for a gesture and set a date for the commencement of round table talks were accomplished. In the course of the negotiations, Sinn Féin was kept informed in advance of the objectives of the negotiations and after the event of the progress made.

8. When on 30 August agreement was reached with the British Government on the core issues of round table talks and the dropping of the gesture, Sinn Féin was informed and asked to confirm that they would co-operate with the International Commission. On 2 September, Sinn Féin informed the Government that this core issues agreement was unacceptable and that if accepted by the Irish Government the peace process would be over. Sinn Féin/IRA said that the only formulation they would accept would be:

"We are now beginning the all-party talks phase of the peace process which will lead to round table talks involving all parties in November.

To mark the beginning of this phase, the two Governments will call a two day convention of all parties to be held in September/October to agree the agenda for the all-party talks.

Parallel to this process both Governments have asked Senator George Mitchell to return as an international arbiter to ensure that the question of all arms, now thankfully silent, is settled to the satisfaction of both Governments. It would be clearly understood that any final agreement would have to contain such satisfaction".

There are indications that they might, under pressure, be prepared to drop their demand for the two day opening convention to be held in September/October.

9. Without round table talks, it is manifestly impossible to achieve an agreed political settlement based on consent. Without the paramilitaries addressing the decommissioning issue, round table talks with the minimum necessary participation could not even commence. The formula tentatively agreed with the British Government does not require the IRA or the loyalist paramilitaries to decommission a single weapon before the commencement of round table talks. (The loyalist paramilitaries have indicated a commitment in principle to decommission).
10. The Irish Government has gone to very considerable lengths to accommodate the Sinn Fein position. It has achieved in negotiation with the British Government modifications and adjustments that address the core concerns expressed by Sinn Féin.
11. If Sinn Féin had signalled their willingness to proceed with the latest proposal, they would have deprived the Unionists parties of their last excuse for declining to join the all party process.

12. If Sinn Féin had been able to support the proposal, they would have removed, decisively and in the eyes of the world, the argument that a refusal to move on the arms issue necessarily implies reliance on an illegal arsenal to lend unfair weight to one party at the negotiating table.

13. The maintenance of an implacable opposition to the modified requirements for some movement on the arms issue serves only to furnish certain strands of Unionism with a continuing excuse for declining to engage in the peace process. It is in the view of the Government, a justification which is unreal and can and should be easily removed. The Government's proposal would have removed it. The position adopted by Sinn Féin serves to keep in place, to the advantage of Unionist intransigence, and the detriment of the peace process, an ongoing excuse for Unionist abstention from the critical all party talks.

14. The Taoiseach requests the Government:
 - (a) generally to endorse the position he is currently taking

 - (b) to approve the postponement of the Summit for a short period to facilitate (i) further attempts to reconcile the conflicting positions and (ii) to prepare political opinion for a possible break in the peace process.

5 September, 1995.