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**Report of a meeting between Sinn Fein and British government representatives,
Friday 20 October 1995**

This report aims to provide accurate information on today's meeting as speedily as possible.

It should not be regarded as either comprehensive or containing all of the relevant detail.

Sinn Fein was represented by Martin McGuinness and Gerry Kelly

The British government was represented by Michael Ancram and Quentin Thomas.

The meeting commenced at 4 pm and concluded at 5.25 pm.

A. Sinn Fein's purpose in the meeting was to explore the possibilities of finding agreement on a workable and effective twin-track approach to move the peace process out of the current impasse.

Sinn Fein brought forward specific proposals in this regard for consideration by the British government. (Find paper attached.)

B. The Sinn Fein representatives sought to engage the British government in a number of areas including:

1. Ensuring that the political track would be a genuine process aimed at the commencement of the negotiations phase of the peace process as soon as possible.
2. A serious discussion on the question of arms.
3. Respective attitudes to a willingness to consider the recommendations of an international body, should one be set up.
4. A discussion on practical matters concerning such a body. That is such matters as how it would work, a timetable and so on.

C. Martin McGuinness made a number of points in opening the Sinn Fein end of the discussion.

1. This is a serious attempt by Sinn Fein to explore a way through an impasse which is not of Sinn Fein's making.
2. We have listened closely, examined and considered carefully everything the British government has said on all aspects of the impasse.
3. Having done so, it remains our view, however, that the impasse arises out of the fact that the British government has turned an objective of the peace process - removing the gun forever from the political equation in Ireland - into a precondition which has become a barrier to progress.
4. In stating this it is not our intention to recriminate. Rather it is to deal with a reality as we know it. There is no possibility of a surrender of weapons by any party to the conflict at this time.

Furthermore, our democratic electoral mandate requires that we cannot and will not accept a pre-

condition on our right to represent Sinn Fein voters in the negotiations which will shape the future of the Irish people.

5. That said, our meeting today, as in previous meetings, is a serious attempt to find a way around this impasse; and in so doing to specifically focus on a twin track approach as a potentially viable means to that end.

6. I must say, however - and again there is no recrimination in what I say - that this concept when mooted earlier in the year was - whatever its merits - scuppered by the British government's attempt to turn an international body into a collection agency for the British government. We could have no part in such an exercise then. We could have no part in such an exercise now.

7. In examining the twin track concept now we do so on a clear basis:

(a) the need for the setting of a date for the negotiations phase of the peace process as the essential next step.

(b) the need to have the pre-condition on Sinn Fein's participation in those negotiations removed.

(c) the need to establish that the terms of reference for any international body are such that Sinn Féin can provide its full and wholehearted co-operation.

8. In anticipation that the joint labours, by all involved in the examination of a twin track approach, prove fruitful, we have commissioned a paper which would constitute a Sinn Fein submission to such a body.

We have directed that the paper address all issues relevant to the terms of reference of an international body and includes a response to the British government's modalities paper. We must, of course, be free to address all other relevant issues likewise.

9. In so doing anything stated will be on the basis of our firmest belief and conviction.

10. And, of course, subject to reaching a workable formula on all of this including a mutual understanding of how all of this would work we would be willing to give serious consideration to the recommendations of an international body on its merits.

D. Martin McGuinness stressed that the political track needed to be a genuine process aimed at the commencement of the negotiations phase of the peace process as soon as possible.

This requires that the political track involves a serious and genuine engagement by both governments to ensure that all-party talks begin not later than the end of November. It cannot be allowed to be used as a veto by any political party, or as a further device to stall the commencement of all-party negotiations.

Sinn Fein's co-operation with an international body, if an acceptable formula involving such a body can be found, will clearly be on the basis that it is one of two tracks designed to bring us all into all-party negotiations. So while the political track must be a serious and genuine political process its purpose of arriving at all-party talks by the stated date must also be serious and genuine.

E. On the issue of a timetable for an international body, Martin McGuinness stated:

It is our view that a period of 2/3 weeks is more than adequate to allow for sensible discussion and deliberation of the issues involved once agreement is reached on its remit and terms of reference.

It is therefore our view that the end of November is a realistic date for the commencement of all party talks.

The British government representatives argued for a prolonged timetable estimating that it would take at least three months, bringing us well into 1996 and that there should be no definite date for all party talks. Also that the three month period could not begin until the announcement of the international body.

F. A without prejudice discussion on how an international body would work took place. Martin McGuinness posed a number of questions in relation to this.

1. Who would be on such a body?
2. How long would it sit?
3. Would its hearings be public/private?
4. Who would it invite to make submissions?
5. Where would it sit?
6. How would it take submissions - verbally/written/questions and answers/a combination?
7. Terms of reference:

On the body British Government representatives only had one name so far - George Mitchel.

Public or private submissions are matter for international body.

Invites to give submissions was up to body but British Government representatives indicated - as narrow as republicans and loyalists. Sinn Fein made point that all political parties and two governments should be given option as they have opinions.

The British government argued to narrow the remit of the body down to dealing with 'illegal' weapons. British government representatives said they didn't know how long political leg of track would take. British Government representatives said that joint communique could be in days.

British Government representatives made it clear that they will not equate 'illegal' and 'legal' arms. They stated in fact that the remit of body would be arms held by paramilitaries.

Sinn Fein explained why it was necessary from nationalist people point of view that British and unionist use of arms and draconian laws must be addressed as many have lost their lives.

British Government representatives insisted on narrow remit.

- ✓ (British government representatives eventually agreed to look at words to see what was possible)
- ✓ British Government representatives invoked Dublin Government on 'legal arms' argument.

Martin McGuinness asked a number of questions about the British governments pre-condition to the commencement of negotiations in the context of an international body.

That is:

Is Washington 3 'off the screen' where an international body would be concerned?

X Would the British government accept recommendations from an international body which disagree with the British government's setting of pre-conditions in the commencement of negotiations?

British Government representatives reiterated that their public and private position remains that W 3 is the only way to all party talks but conceded that an international body may produce a way around which neither side could suggest to each other at this time.

The British government representatives asked about an answer to the 'non document' and were told that it was contained in the document we handed over at this meeting.

The British government representatives made it clear that the international body would not be a collection agency for arms. That it should only deal with the way.

In a statement to the media following the meeting, Sinn Fein said:

"At their last meeting Martin McGuinness and Michael Ancram agreed to a further meeting. This meeting took place at 4 pm and lasted an hour and a half.

Their discussions are part of the ongoing efforts to end the current impasse in the peace process by finding a formula acceptable to everyone.

To this end Sinn Fein made firm proposals to the British government which we believe can end the impasse.

Clearly what is required is a date for all-party talks and the removal of preconditions to involvement in those talks."

Initial Comments

The above report aims to provide information on today's meeting in as timely a way as is possible.

For that reason this report should not be considered to be comprehensive. In like manner, and for the same reason, the following comments are limited in scope.

That said, there are three issues arising from today's meeting which cause us great concern and do not give rise to optimism.

1. The British government view of a timetable for an international body, to get to the point of bringing its report forward, is that a period of three months could be involved. That is, as things are progressing at present, February 96.

In our view this would be potentially disastrous to a process in which confidence has already seriously waned and which already has a credibility deficit.

2. Comments by British government representatives today were quite explicit about only 'relevant' parties making submissions to or co-operating with an international body.

Sinn Fein could not and would not attempt to defend with our constituency subjecting ourselves to such a 'test'.

3. Comments by British government representatives suggest that whatever an international body might say about Washington 1 and 2, that Washington 3 will remain intact.

Everyone has to take risks in this process. Sinn Fein has taken its share and is prepared to take further risks. But we must be sure we are dealing with risks rather than predetermined conclusions.