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Reference Code: 2021/97/43

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**Speech by An Taoiseach, Mr. John Bruton, T.D., in
Dail Eireann following the publication of the
November 28, 1995 Communiqué**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

A Cheann Comhairle,

Deputies will have received a copy of a communiqué issued by Prime Minister Major and myself last evening.

Before coming to the text, I would wish to avail of this opportunity to pay tribute to the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and the officials of his Department and the Department of Justice and my own Department for their skill and determination in the negotiation of this communiqué.

The Minister for Social Welfare has been involved on an almost daily basis in the process, and the Minister for Justice has played a vital role at critical junctures.

I would like to avail of this opportunity to convey my thanks to the House. The general support in the House for what the Government has been seeking to achieve has been important, and especially the House's patience in not pressing me in recent weeks when negotiations with the British were at a particularly sensitive and delicate phase.

I want to say that this agreement would have been quite impossible without the concentrated engagement, the mastery of detail, and the willingness to set times aside at short notice, that was shown by the British Prime Minister, John Major.

What the British and Irish Governments launched last evening by way of communiqué was a twin-track process, a means to bring the two Governments and the Northern Ireland parties together for constructive negotiations at the earliest possible date, and in the best possible atmosphere.

Both Governments have the firm aim of launching these all-party negotiations by the end of February, 1996. If our time-table is to be achieved, we will have to have the fullest and, indeed, the earliest, co-operation from all parties. Clearly, some parties will need time to study the communiqué. It is not a simple document. The two Governments have been working on it for many

months, and it is not unreasonable to give the Northern Ireland parties the time necessary to analyse it and reflect on its contents.

Representatives of both Governments are available to provide to the parties any elaboration or explanation of detail that may be required. I would ask the parties which are considering their definitive responses to accept our offer of more detailed briefing if they feel that would be helpful. Time is not on our side. Events will not stand still. We are either moving forward or we run the risk of going backwards.

The two Governments have given the peace process a renewed momentum. But everybody must stand ready to make the compromises necessary to take advantage of that. A willingness to compromise is a sign of strength. An unwillingness to do so can often be a sign of weakness, or uncertainty.

I would now like to come to the text of the communiqué which sets out the agreement between the two Governments on the twin-track process.

The tracks will work in parallel and simultaneously. I want to emphasise that progress in one track will facilitate progress in the other. They must be mutually reinforcing.

The first track will be an intensive series of discussions which we intend to begin almost immediately, involving all the political parties in Northern Ireland and working on an equal basis with the Governments, to lay the ground work, and build up the trust necessary to ensure that the all-party negotiations, to which we are committed, will be a success.

In this political track, the two Governments will have intensive preparatory talks with the Northern Ireland parties, with a remit to reach widespread agreement on the basis, participation, structure, format and agenda to bring all parties together for substantive negotiations aimed at a political settlement based on consent. These talks will have an open agenda, allowing any party to raise any relevant matter. As the communiqué states:

"These matters could include how best the structure and format of all-party negotiations, involving in appropriate strands, both Governments and all the relevant Northern Ireland parties, directed to addressing in a comprehensive manner all the relevant relationships in an interlocking three-stranded process, can properly take account of

democratic mandates and principles, including whether and how an elected body could play a part."

Again to quote from the communiqué:

"In managing the process of preparatory talks, each Government will build on existing exchanges and bilateral contacts, treating each party on an equal basis: they will encourage other formats for meetings with the parties and among the parties, including meetings between the two Governments together and one or more parties, with their agreement, which might further the objective of the preparatory talks".

I do not at this stage wish to say very much more about the political track. The Governments have set out their joint position in the communiqué but we are only two of the parties in a negotiation which I hope will, if it is to work to full effect, involve both Governments and all political parties in Northern Ireland. It is not for us to impose an agenda, a format, a location or anything else. These things will have to emerge by agreement and if we are to achieve the objective of all-party negotiations by the end of February, 1996, all concerned will have to show flexibility and a willingness to take fully into account the concerns and difficulties of the other parties.

Obviously, the work done by both Governments and by the Northern Ireland parties in recent times may facilitate progress as we move along this preparatory political track.

Last February, for example, the two Governments jointly published a New Framework for Agreement, a shared understanding between London and Dublin to assist discussion and negotiation involving the Northern Ireland parties. At about the same time, a number of the Northern Ireland parties published their own proposals. We now have an opportunity for the first time, to sit down and see how we might best interact with one another about these various proposals. The public focus up to now has tended to be on the differences between the various proposals but they have in fact many common features.

While the task ahead of us is a daunting one, the available documents, along with much other work done, including in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, provide a fruitful ground for our preparatory talks.

May I move now to the second of the two tracks, the decommissioning track.

In parallel with the political track, the two Governments have agreed to establish an International Body to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue. The background to this decision is well known. One of the obstacles on the road to inclusive all-party talks is the lack of trust deriving from the fact that, even though we have had fifteen months of peace, frightening quantities of explosives, arms, and ammunition are known to be held in both jurisdictions. Given the events of the last twenty five years, these are a threat to the peace, and are clearly seen as such. For many people it is not enough - important though that achievement is - that the arms have been silent for fifteen months, and that parties associated with their use have said that they are now committed to achieving their objectives through peaceful and democratic means. While parties in this House may, for instance, be prepared to take the Republican movement at its word, it is obvious that the unionists and the British Government are not. That is a reality we must face.

Against that background, the British Government has for some time been of the view that all-party talks could not usefully commence until a start, at least, had been made on decommissioning. The Irish Government has, albeit reluctantly, accepted that this will not happen before the commencement of such talks.

Our reluctance should not be taken in any way as a weakening of our resolve to rid this country North and South of all bombs, guns and bullets. As Taoiseach, I find it abhorrent that weapons should be in the hands of anyone in this jurisdiction other than in those of the lawfully constituted security forces. The use or threatened use of violence in the achievement of political objectives has no place in a democratic society.

Nor is it sufficient in this day and age to refer to the precedent of the pikes in the thatch or the guns in the bog. Sadly nowadays we live in a more complex and crime ridden society. Within a few miles of this House on one day recently there were three murders involving the use of guns. While there is no suggestions that these murders involved paramilitaries or weapons controlled by paramilitaries, we cannot take the risk that guns originally brought into this country by paramilitaries will end up in the hands of criminals. Total and verifiable removal of these arms at the earliest possible date is the only outcome that will ultimately be acceptable to the people of Ireland, North and South.

The twin track process is an effort to overcome this disagreement. In particular, both Governments have agreed to establish an international body to

provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue. We have invited the distinguished US Senator George Mitchell to chair the Body and we are inviting two other eminent persons, one Canadian and one Finnish, to serve as the other members of the Body. We expect to be in a position to announce their names within a matter of days.

I am delighted to be able to confirm to the House that Senator George Mitchell has accepted the invitation and is ready to start work almost immediately. He will in fact be arriving in Belfast tomorrow as a member of President Clinton's party and I look forward to seeing him here on Friday. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Senator Mitchell and I know that I speak on behalf of all the members of this house and, indeed, of all the people of Ireland, in wishing him every success in his endeavours.

He has already show his extraordinary friendship and support for all the people on this island, north and south, unionist and nationalist, republican and loyalist, by the work he has done as Special Adviser to the US President for Economic Initiatives in Ireland and through his role in the organisation of the White House Conference for Trade and Investment in Ireland last May.

He is now about to tackle a problem which has in the long history of our country never been successfully tackled. Despite the depth, complexity and known current difficulties, Senator Mitchell has unhesitatingly agreed to tackle it. I believe that his knowledge, experience and his personal qualities uniquely fit him for this task.

The International Body under Senator Mitchell's chairmanship will determine its own procedures. In particular, it has been asked - and I quote for the communiqué - " to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue".

I want to emphasise this paragraph. It is very broadly phrased. And the assessment is to be independent. That is important.

Furthermore, the Government have, in particular, asked the Body to

- identify and advise on a suitable and acceptable method for full and verifiable decommissioning; and
- report whether there is a clear commitment on the part of those in possession of such arms to work constructively to achieve that.

We have asked the Body to submit its report to the two Governments by mid January, 1996. Again, the time frame gives an indication of the pace at which we expect the twin-track mechanism to work. I hope the relevant parties will recognise that, if the overall timetable we have set is to work, it is important that they complete their analysis of the communiqué as soon as possible.

It is expected that the International Body will consult widely, invite relevant parties to submit their analysis of matters relevant to the decommissioning issue and, in reaching its conclusions within its remit, to consider such evidence on its merits. The Body will be capable of operating in both jurisdictions and will have offices in Dublin and in Belfast. It will be for the Body to decide who to meet. The Governments will place no restrictions on the Body in regard to who it may talk to in order to fulfil its mandate and it will be able to receive information about matters falling within its remit in confidence. While we would expect that details of the Body's consultations with the two Governments and the parties will be confidential, it will be a matter for the Body itself to decide on a day to day basis how much publicity to give to its work.

The Governments considered in detail the critical issue of what attitude the Body and the Governments will take to the various submissions which both Governments expect to be made to the Body. We agreed a specific response which recognises the differences between the Government in relation to the Washington 3 criterion. That response crucially includes the following agreed text

"But, as the Communiqué makes clear, the Governments are not setting limits to the scope of the submissions which may be made to the Body or in the preparatory talks. As paragraph 8 makes clear, it will be for the Body, in reaching conclusions within its remit, to consider such evidence on its merits.

Both Governments will consider constructively any practicable suggestion that could help bring all parties into negotiations on the basis of the Downing Street Declaration and would do so in the light of the discussions in the political track".

I believe the use of the terms "consider constructively" is particularly important here. But those making submissions to the Body must approach their task in an equally constructive spirit.

The costs of the Body will be met jointly by both Governments. It will be serviced by a Secretariat, the arrangements in regard to which will be a matter for discussion between the two Governments and the Body itself. Obviously, since the Body is independent it will be free to choose its own staff.

As the communiqué makes clear, the Governments are not setting limits to the scope of the submissions which may be made to the Body and, as paragraph 8 makes clear, it will be for the Body in reaching conclusions within its remit to consider such evidence on its merits.

Neither Government or any other party co-operating with the work of the Body is asked to abandon their well known position, nor are they bound in advance to accept its recommendations which will be advisory. What is important is that the two Governments have agreed that they will consider carefully any recommendation the Body makes and give them due weight on their merits. I have no doubt but that both Governments will consider constructively any practicable suggestion that could help all parties into negotiations as quickly as possible.

We have embarked on the twin tracks to clear the obstacles to all-party negotiations. The two Governments, acting separately or jointly, cannot clear these obstacles on their own. These obstacles can only be cleared by all of us, working together in a spirit of trust, goodwill and harmony. Many parties have already taken risks for peace. I salute them for that. They, we, and others may have to show even greater courage as we move into the next critical phase of this process. The peace process has now become a political process. That is why I look forward now with optimism and confidence.