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STATEMENT BY DUP LEADER DR IAN PAISLEY MP
MEP

DECOMMISSIONING MUST NOT BE FUDGED

The issue of the handing over for destruction of illegal terrorist weapons is more important today than it has ever been.

IRA/Sinn Fein has proved that its word can never be trusted. If it is ever to turn away from the path of terrorism then it will have to demonstrate in a tangible and realistic way that it is committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic methods. Its arsenal of terror must be destroyed.

Having made the handing over of illegal weapons an essential pre-condition for the entry of IRA/Sinn Fein into the Talks process, the reality is that the British government has spent the last 2 years back-tracking on every single commitment it has ever made on the issue. IRA/Sinn Fein has not moved one iota. Government has done all the moving and it has been one way traffic in the direction of the terrorists.

In these talks the British government is engaged in trying to con the people of N Ireland over decommissioning. The DUP will not tolerate a situation where government is engaged in subverting the resolution of the issue of decommissioning which it declared would be at the top of the agenda and would have to be addressed at the outset of the talks process. It has now abandoned even the minimum requirements set out in the "Washington 3" formula enunciated by the Secretary of State whereby the IRA would have to decommission some arms "as a tangible confidence building measure and to signal the start of a process".

An attempt is being made to smooth the way for the insertion of IRA/Sinn Fein into the Talks process without a single weapon being handed over. Then it is planned to shunt the issue off into a siding so that no weapons would actually ever have to be handed over except on terms acceptable to the IRA. Such a scenario will never be acceptable to the vast majority of the people of N Ireland.

Furthermore, we utterly deplore the government's plan to introduce legislation which would ban forensic evidence gathered from illegal weapons from being used in a court to help obtain the convictions of terrorists. The granting of what amounts to an amnesty to those who might otherwise be convicted of the most serious of crimes because of crucial forensic evidence is an atrocious move. The fact that this ban on the use of such evidence will apply only to N Ireland and not to the rest of the United Kingdom only adds insult to injury. What message does such a distinction send to the relatives and loved ones of IRA victims here? Crimes committed against people here in Ulster are not to be regarded in the same way by the British government as crimes committed on the mainland. The DUP intends to resist any provision which values the lives of Ulster people as being of less worth than the lives of people elsewhere in the United Kingdom and which would enable murderers to escape justice.

We have asked for a copy of the latest position of the British and Dublin governments as set out in their communication with the Ulster Unionists. The SDLP has already been fully briefed by Dublin. However, the government has denied us access to these proposals.

These proposals follow a series of meetings held with the Ulster Unionists by Dublin and the British government, during which time plenary sessions of the talks have been cancelled or deferred. The DUP has not been party to these meetings.

Neither were the UK Unionists. It is clear that both governments and the SDLP believed progress in their terms was being made last week. Indeed the substance of the Ulster Unionist motion for the Forum submitted last week welcoming progress being made in the talks supports that view. It is also clear that both governments, having witnessed the earlier last-minute cave-in by the Ulster Unionists over the appointment of the Chairman, are focussing on that party as unionism's achilles heel on the issue of decommissioning.

The DUP believes the way forward is for all unionists to work together on the basis of an agreed strategy and a common position. In such a case the negotiating position of unionism would be immensely strengthened. It is in standing together that unionism can defeat the conspiracy to grant the IRA and Sinn Fein the concession they seek. Evidently, and regrettably, the Ulster Unionists do not share that view. That is to the detriment of unionism.

I must warn the government that it cannot conspire to satisfy the demands of IRA/Sinn Fein and ride roughshod over the people of N Ireland. The people demand nothing less than the dismantling of the terrorist war machines. In the wake of the events of the last few days any attempt to circumvent that legitimate demand and to permit IRA/Sinn Fein to enter talks by a back door after the calling of another bogus conditional ceasefire would be a recipe for disaster.