



**BRITISH-IRISH  
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH  
NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

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**FOURTEENTH PLENARY SESSION**

**1 and 2 December 1997**

**Mountbatten Suite, Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
(Final Revised Edition)

**(Produced by the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association)**

**MONDAY 1 DECEMBER 1997**

**The sitting was opened in public at 2.45 pm in the Mountbatten Suite, Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London, with Mr Peter Temple-Morris in the Chair.**

**The Chairman** welcomed members to the Fourteenth Plenary Session. He explained his obligation to stand down from the Body.

## **1. CO-CHAIRMEN**

*Ordered,* That Mr Michael O'Kennedy and Mr David Winnick be Co-Chairmen of the Body.-(**Dr Rory O'Hanlon.**)

### **Mr David Winnick took the Chair as Chairman**

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) thanked the Body and welcomed Mr Michael O'Kennedy. He paid tribute to Mr Temple-Morris and his work for the Body over the past 7 years, noting that he was probably as well known in Ireland as he was in the United Kingdom.

**Mr Michael O'Kennedy** (Tipperary North) said that it was a privilege to have the opportunity to work for the Body. David Winnick and he had previously worked together on Committees of the Body and hoped to continue that cooperation. He also paid tribute to Peter Temple-Morris. Through his work for the Body he had created an awareness of what people had in common and diminished what divided them. It was to be hoped that Mr Temple-Morris would continue his association with the Body.

In future, the Body might be able to play a supporting role during the United Kingdom Presidency of the European Union. He quoted, in Gaelic, the proverb "There's no effective power without common purpose".

**The Chairman** invited Mr Temple-Morris to speak.

**Mr Peter Temple-Morris** (Leominster) commented on the close rapport that he had with the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. Of the many resignations he had been forced to make over the last few weeks, the one which had hurt him most was leaving the Body.

He paid tribute to a number of members of the Body from both sides with whom he had worked in establishing the Body. In particular, he mentioned, on the British side, Stuart Bell and Andrew McKay and, on the Irish side, Jim Tunney, Peter Barry and Dick Spring. Great help had been received also from Ministers in the two Governments, Brian Lenihan and Sir Geoffery Howe. He also paid tribute to the Co-Chairmen with whom he had worked, Dermot Ahern and Paul Bradford, and to the Clerks and other officials working with the Body. He wished the new Co-Chairmen

well in their new roles, and concluded by noting that, along with the privilege of representing his constituency, his work with the Body had represented the happiest moments of his political life.

**The Chairman** added his own thanks to Paul Bradford, the other departing Co-Chairman, who had been a source of great strength to the Body.

**Mr Michael O'Kennedy** (Tipperary North) associated himself with the tributes paid to his predecessor, Paul Bradford.

## **2. VICE-CHAIRMEN**

*Ordered,* That Mr Charles Flanagan, Mr Michael Mates, Mr Kevin McNamara and Dr Rory O'Hanlon be Vice-Chairmen of the Body.-(**Mr Michael O'Kennedy.**)

**The Chairman** recorded Mr Michael Mates's apologies that he was unable to be present due to illness.

## **3. PRIVILEGE**

**The Chairman** reminded members that parliamentary privilege did not apply to the deliberations of the Body.

## **4. ASSOCIATE MEMBERS**

**The Chairman** gave notice that in accordance with Rule 2(a), **Mr Nick Ainger, Mr John Browne, Kate Hoey and Mr Robert Jackson**, being associate members, had accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of members for the whole of the session.

## **5. MR JIM KEMMY TD**

**The Chairman** reported to members of the Body that since the last Plenary Mr Jim Kemmy, who had long been associated with the Body, had died; and he invited members to stand in tribute to him. (*members stood in tribute*)

## **6. ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS**

**Motion made, and Question proposed:**

That the proposed Programme of Business for the current session be approved-(**Mr Kevin McNamara**);

**Mr Kevin McNamara** (Hull North), moving the Motion, informed members that the Steering Committee had requested that members wishing to speak during the debate on the following morning on recent political developments should notify

either of the two Clerks in order to help the Chairmen in the selection of speakers and in consideration of time-limits.

*Ordered,* That the proposed Programme of Business for the current session be approved.

**The sitting was suspended till 15.30 pm.**

**The sitting resumed at 3.30 pm.**

## **7. STATEMENT BY THE RT HON DR MARJORIE MOWLAM MP, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

**The Chairman** introduced the Rt hon Dr Mo Mowlam, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He said that she had established a strong reputation in politics since she entered the House in 1987. From the moment she was appointed as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland she had been determined to bring all sides to the negotiating table and to bring about a settlement and the end to the violence which the majority of people in Northern Ireland desired.

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland** began by acknowledging the time and effort which many people in both the UK and Ireland, in Government and Opposition, had expended in the search for a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland. She spoke as follows:

Thank you. I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak to the 14th Plenary Session of this Body.

I would like to begin by paying tribute to the outgoing Co-Chairmen, Peter Temple-Morris and Paul Bradford. I know they have served this Body well. I think it is fair to say that Peter particularly has seen the Body flourish from its beginnings. I would also like to congratulate Michael O'Kennedy and David Winnick on their appointments as new Co-Chairmen of the Body. I wish them a productive and enjoyable period in office. My ministerial colleagues and I would be glad to give them whatever support we can in the years to come.

Today I look forward to answering your questions. But I would first like to talk with you about what I believe our aims and objectives as a British Government should be, to reflect on what has been achieved - working together with the Irish Government and the Parties in Northern Ireland - since the election in May, and to look forward to what I hope will emerge from these negotiations.

The new Government was elected on the basis of clear principles: principles of fairness, justice and equality of opportunity. They are at the heart of our Party's constitution, they are at the heart of our manifesto and they underpin everything we do.

They matter most of all in Northern Ireland because the history of unfairness, injustice and inequality still impinges on politics there today. We began by saying that any approach to Northern Ireland's many problems must take account of economic, social and political factors. And that political dialogue - talking - is the only means by which a fair, long-term political settlement in Northern Ireland can be achieved. Alongside that, we want to see a peaceful and stable background for economic growth. We want to see a political settlement that will have the broad support of both sides of the community and the consent of the people.

Working together, we are moving towards that goal. It does not require compromise of people's basic loyalties, nor of their basic principles. But it does require that people reach out to one another, establish the common ground and build on what they find there. People across Northern Ireland in all walks of life have been doing that for years. Now, for the first time in 70 years, the political representatives of all shades of opinion in Northern Ireland are engaged in talks designed to build on what they have in common, not what sets them apart.

The British Government and the Irish Government are only two participants in the process. Paul Murphy is leading our team. He is working very closely with David Andrews and, before him, Ray Burke. Along with talks chairs, George Mitchell, John de Chastelain and Harri Holkeri, we are there with the Northern Ireland Parties tackling an agenda which for the first time has a real chance of dealing with the concerns on both sides of the community.

The British and Irish Governments have been working closely together for a number of years now. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration and the Joint Framework Document are a testament to that work.

Wherever possible, principles have been established and accommodation sought. The principles of agreement and consent are now at the heart of the talks: agreement between the Parties within the talks, and the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. It is for the people of Northern Ireland to decide whether they wish to remain part of the United Kingdom or be part of a united Ireland. There will be no change in Northern Ireland's status as part of the UK without the clear consent of a majority of the people who live there.

First, we have to get agreement in the talks. Some people believe the positions of the parties are irreconcilable. I disagree. Like Tony Blair, I am not dewy-eyed. I know that the nearer we get to agreement, the more difficult it will be. But we have a carefully constructed and agreed format for the talks, and a goal to reach agreement by May next year.

Since moving into substantive negotiations the participants have produced a number of papers on the key issues which need to be resolved if there is to be a settlement. We have not so far seen specific, focussed deal-making on the key issues. This is not surprising. We are less than two months into substantive talks. The process was never going to be easy. There are real difficulties to be grappled with. But we have

seen an increasing level of engagement during the last two weeks since the process moved into a period of intensive bilaterals.

These bilaterals, and those held by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, are a crucial complement to the round-table talks. They are not of course a substitute for them. All parties will have to participate in the negotiation of any settlement. It is the review plenary this week. My hope is that we can make real progress.

We have had some useful discussions, and the possible elements of an overall settlement are beginning to be discernible. It will certainly include a formal recognition of the consent principle in all its aspects, reflected in amendments to relevant constitutional legislation. It is likely to include locally elected institutions of government in Northern Ireland, established on a widely accepted basis. There are likely to be North-South structures with real responsibility but which are accountable to government institutions in Northern Ireland and the Republic. There is also likely to be standing intergovernmental machinery between the British and Irish Governments, and some wider structures to include not only the British and Irish Governments but also the Northern Ireland administration, and representatives of devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales. And there will be a need for effective safeguards for human rights and arrangements to ensure equality.

There are delicate balances to be struck within and between all these key elements, and much painstaking negotiation will be required on the details. But I know that a settlement *is* possible. The talks participants have it in their power to reach agreement on new arrangements which could win the full-hearted support of both main political traditions. For our part, we will continue to help drive the process forward.

Prime Minister Tony Blair has been direct and up-front. From the very beginning in May, he has continually shown his personal commitment to move the process on rapidly.

Alongside the talks we have also advanced the pace of change. Here again, principles of fairness, justice and equality underpin our approach. There will be no second-class citizens in Northern Ireland. We are determined to see respect for the rights and freedoms of everyone. We are committed to building a society where different identities are treated equally and with respect.

This has been called confidence building-but it is really about giving everyone in Northern Ireland the same rights and privileges enjoyed in peaceful and democratic societies across the world. That is how I would like our programme to be seen: to guarantee human rights, to combat discrimination in the labour market, to reach accommodation over parades, and to make policing more accountable and acceptable to both communities. These measures are important to *all* in the community.

We have already published a White Paper on the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into Law in Britain and Northern Ireland. Further provisions will be examined with the parties in the talks which might be appropriate for the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland.

We are seeking to increase confidence in *policing* through the establishment of clear objectives; changes in policing structures; greater accountability and the creation of an independent complaints system.

As the recent Report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights reflects, a great deal of progress has been made in the area of *employment equality* since the Fair Employment Act was passed by the last Labour Government in 1976.

The SACHR Report contains over 160 recommendations. It reflects a thorough and wide-ranging analysis of the various elements affecting equality of opportunity in employment. I am grateful for the work which SACHR has put into its review. It is helping to shape our policies not only on fair employment but also on provision for the unemployed and the socially disadvantaged. Many of SACHR's ideas on tackling long-term unemployment are close to our own policies on the New Deal.

We have already done other things to show our commitment to the employment equality issue. We have launched an audit of Targeted Social Need in every Northern Ireland Department to measure their individual success. We are also looking to resolve complaints quicker, to strengthen action against persistent discrimination and to clarify the law on recruiting from the unemployed.

All of SACHR's recommendations have been subject to extensive assessment in recent months by officials. They are very advanced in that work, and we intend to publish a full paper later in the winter.

On the economic front, there is new hope and confidence amongst the business community in Northern Ireland. Unemployment has halved in a year, there are new jobs, new opportunities and new investment from home and abroad.

Northern Ireland benefits from great international goodwill. I thank all those who support Northern Ireland economically. It is good for business, and it is good for peace.

New opportunities are springing from the new atmosphere in Northern Ireland. Already, those charged with security have been able to announce prudent steps in response to the reduced threat on the streets. There has been a significant de-escalation throughout Northern Ireland since July, building on those measures taken during the previous cease-fire but never reversed. Military activity throughout Northern Ireland has reduced by around a third, there are no military patrols in Belfast, Londonderry and Newry town centres, RUC foot patrols are unaccompanied in West Belfast during the day, and a battalion of soldiers has been re-located to the mainland.

On Tuesday 25 November the Chief Constable was further able to announce the ending of Army support for RUC foot patrols in West Belfast. This is a significant and widely welcomed step. Further steps like this on the road to normality will be taken when possible. This will depend entirely on the level of threat prevailing at the time and the assessment of that threat made by the Chief Constable and General Officer Commanding.

People in Northern Ireland should enjoy a normal environment of civil rights too. The legislation to implement the North Report which is now before Parliament is based on the approach of rights and responsibilities. The right to march (or a peaceful assembly) is a basic right which brings with it the responsibility to respect the rights of freedoms of others. Where rights conflict, an accommodation has to be found.

The aim of our legislation, and the work of the Independent Parades Commission, is designed to make accommodation possible where it has not been in the past. If that fails, the Commission will have the power to make a fair and balanced decision on how and where parades should go ahead, taking into account the wider interests of the whole community.

Prison issues, as the Mitchell Report recognised, are important for people in both communities. The Government has already taken action to promote confidence in this area. More than 240 prisoners have been released early since 1995. Prisoners on temporary transfer to Northern Ireland are now eligible for temporary release under local rules and most of the prisoners have already taken periods of leave release under the new arrangements. Six Republican prisoners and nine other prisoners have already been repatriated from England and Wales to the Republic of Ireland. The Home Secretary has recently agreed the repatriation of three further Republican prisoners; further applications are under consideration by the two Governments. Since 1992, 14 prisoners have been transferred to Northern Ireland and a further 15 have been temporarily transferred; only one case remains in the pipeline and a decision is expected shortly. I have also since coming into Government directed that reviews of life sentence cases will now take place more frequently to ensure that the process continues to take account of the changed circumstances of the cease-fires.

So we have already responded in a realistic and flexible way. Further movement will continue to be consistent with our principles to ensure the safety of the public and maintain the confidence of the community in the criminal justice system.

We recognise that the events in Northern Ireland have not happened in isolation. They are interwoven in the difficulties and upheavals of our troubled past. My approach throughout has been to say that we should understand the past, to recognise its importance, but not to live in it. Some episodes in the past - like the events at Bloody Sunday - live with us still. The pain and distress of the families of the Bloody Sunday victims is very clearly still there after 25 years. That is why we have studied carefully the material presented to us by the Irish Government and by the families of those who were killed and injured. We cannot remove their pain and suffering with words alone. No options have been ruled out, but I am not yet in a



position to say what action we will take. I will make a statement as soon as possible. I hope that will be very soon.

I have concentrated today on matters that I hope are of concern to you. They are of concern to us all, and especially to people in Northern Ireland. Their lives, the lives of families, the lives of young people, have been blighted by year after year of violence and bloodshed. It is time for that to end for good.

I believe we have reached a turning-point in the history of our two nations. Arguments that have raged for decades are being brought to the table and discussed. This Body is a good example of one of those areas.

Both communities in Northern Ireland - Unionist and Nationalist - are proud of their histories, proud of their identities, and proud of their traditions, just as we in our respective countries have been proud of these things. As the existence of this Body shows, we have been able to reach out to one another and to work together. I have long hoped to see, and believe I am beginning to see, the parties in Northern Ireland start to do the same.

Of course there are differences and disagreements. All relationships thrive on those. But they also thrive on the principles and objectives that they share. In Northern Ireland that means a lasting peaceful political settlement. It is what the people who live there hope and pray for every day. This Body has a supportive and constructive role to play in helping to bring that about. So I thank you for asking me here to speak to you today and I look forward to working with you throughout this Parliament and beyond.

**The Chairman** welcomed the presence of Mr Adam Ingram MP, Minister of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Andrew McKay MP, the Opposition Shadow Secretary of State and the Irish Ambassador, HE Mr Edward Barrington, at the Plenary Session.

## **8. QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER**

### *Permanent vehicle checkpoints*

**Mr Brendan Smith** (Cavan-Monaghan) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she would outline proposals to remove the permanent vehicle checkpoints at Mullan, Gortmullan and Wattlebridge on the Fermanagh-Cavan border; if she would indicate the proposed timescale of such development; and if she would make a statement.

**Dr Mowlam** said that although progress was being made, a terrorist threat at the fringes still existed for the people of Northern Ireland. Nevertheless she agreed that it was very important for people in Northern Ireland to see positive results from the cease-fire. The Chief Constable and the GOC took operational decisions in these matters. If the cease-fire held, matters such as the continuing presence of checkpoints would be addressed.

**Mr Brendan Smith** (Cavan-Monaghan) pointed out that the checkpoints along the Border were unsightly and a hindrance to trade and commerce in the Border region. They presented a bad image to tourists and visitors, and should be removed as soon as possible to build confidence.

**Dr Mowlam** did not dissent from Mr Smith's analysis. There was an ongoing plan to build confidence for local residents, the business community and investors alike. However judgements had to be made in the light of security developments, such as the bomb at Markethill.

**Mr Andrew Boylan** (Cavan-Monaghan) questioned the necessity for checkpoints and lookout towers, which caused great annoyance to local communities. Intelligence was good on both sides of the Border, and local people did not understand what purpose checkpoints were serving.

**Dr Rory O'Hanlon** (Cavan-Monaghan) asked whether Dr Mowlam was aware of the concern of people on the Border, especially in South Armagh, at the presence of checkpoints and lookout towers.

**Mr Brendan McGahon** (Louth) said that observation towers were a reminder of the horrific scale of killing in Northern Ireland in the past. The IRA had broken their solemn obligations in the peace process, and it would be naïve of the Body to support the removal of lookout posts. Dr Mowlam would be wise to be wary and wait before taking any action.

**Dr Mowlam** agreed that there was a need to build trust and confidence on both sides. She was determined that the peace process would be pushed forward. Judgements had to be made in the light of the IRA cease-fire and continuing violence in Northern Ireland. At the beginning of the second cease-fire there had been a high level of wariness in Northern Ireland. People were now less wary and coming to appreciate that talking worked. Checkpoints were undoubtedly unattractive and the Government had positive plans in relation to them. Some steps had already been taken.

#### *Recruitment of police officers*

**Mr John Home Robertson** (East Lothian) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she would make a statement on the recruitment of police officers from the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland.

**Dr Mowlam** said that a number of changes were under consideration. A Police Bill for Northern Ireland was being considered as a candidate for legislative time. It would provide means for an independent complaints procedure in relation to the RUC, it would improve the RUC's openness, and it would decentralise the allocation of police funding to respond to the needs of local communities. On the question of recruitment, historically, Nationalists who wished to join the RUC had come under intense pressure. During the last cease-fire, recruitment from the Nationalist

community had risen to 22 per cent. However 93 per cent of the RUC were still Protestant. A cultural change was needed-and that would take time.

**Mr John Home Robertson** (East Lothian) acknowledged the history of the problem. The Chief Constable and the RUC were making the best of a difficult job. He asked whether the new Police Bill would include provisions to improve recruitment from Nationalist communities, to change the title of the RUC, and to decentralise the police force on a community basis.

**Dr Mowlam** said that the Bill would allow local forces to allocate some funding, and in that sense would decentralise the RUC. An RUC/Police Authority review of selection and recruitment procedures was under way. Under the Bill, the RUC would be subtitled as the "Northern Ireland Police Service". Recruits would also be able to take the oath in the Scottish manner. It was necessary for people to accept that many members of the RUC had put their lives at risk in the past to protect the community, and that many in the RUC accepted the need for balance. Members of the RUC were worried about their job security and pensions, just as people were in other walks of life. As with changes in other aspects of Northern Ireland life, the crucial factor was the success of the peace process itself.

**Mr Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire) asked whether there were plans to initiate a high profile strategy within Nationalist communities to increase the acceptability of joining the RUC, possibly by emphasising community policing.

**Ms Marian McGennis** (Dublin Central) said that it was necessary to build confidence in the Nationalist community, since without confidence a recruitment drive would not work.

**Dr Mowlam** said that change would be brought about through progress in the peace talks. The nature of the police force was a matter for discussion between the parties, and it was up to the people and parties of Northern Ireland to determine the process.

#### *Government by consent*

**Mr Austin Currie** (Dublin West) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether in the context of the All-Party Talks it was her policy that the consent of the governed was necessary as well as the consent of the majority.

**Dr Mowlam** asked for clarification of the term "consent of the governed".

**Mr Austin Currie** (Dublin West) said that the Joint Framework Document had described the "consent of the governed" as a guiding principle of progress in Northern Ireland. In terms of the joint referendum in the North and the South on any agreement, it was obviously essential for there to be a majority in both referenda. But in addition, practical politics dictated that, if there were to be new institutions, a majority over the island as a whole would be a very important factor in providing a mandate for them. On the matter of symbols, Stormont, with its statues of Lord

Carson and Lord Craigavon, did not acknowledge the fact that 40 per cent of the Northern Ireland population was of a different identity and allegiance.

**Dr Mowlam** said that before any proposals were put in the form of referendums, the consent and agreement of both sides of the political debate in Northern Ireland were needed. The referendum itself would determine the consent of the people. Technically speaking, a majority of 51 per cent was required; in practical terms however, a bigger consensus would be needed to make the process workable. Symbols were not central to the peace process; what mattered was changing fundamentals. In relation to Stormont, it was necessary to look to the future and to how people would perceive it in the future. There were various ideas in hand for making Stormont open to the people of Northern Ireland as a whole. Possibilities included pop concerts, classical music, a playground, a running track and a nature trail.

#### *The development of the peace process*

**Mr Dennis Canavan** (Falkirk West) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she would make a statement about the development of the peace process.

**Dr Mowlam** replied that a response to that question had, in effect, been included in her earlier statement to the Body.

**Mr Dennis Canavan** (Falkirk West) congratulated Dr Mowlam on the progress so far in the talks process, noting that participation in the process remained incomplete in respect of the Unionist Parties. As far as the talks on Strand Two, he suggested that it should be accepted that any cross-Border body needed to have some executive power.

**Dr Mowlam** agreed that it would be helpful to have the participation of all the Unionist Parties in the talks and felt that those Parties' voices would be the stronger for such participation. As for the outcome of the talks on the Strand Two, it was not for her, but rather for those taking part in the negotiations, to set down what the results should be .

#### *Transfer of prisoners*

**Mr Caoimhghin Ó Caoláin** (Cavan-Monaghan) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she acknowledged the need to make progress in the negotiations at Stormont and on substantive measures of equality and confidence-building, notably in the area of demilitarisation and prisoners, in particular the plight of long-term Irish Republican prisoners in English prisons, transfers to jails in Ireland and the implementation of a programme of releases of political prisoners.

**Dr Mowlam** replied that, in respect of confidence-building measures, she had set out the progress being made on demilitarisation and in respect of prisoners during her statement.

**Mr Caoimhghin Ó Caoláin** (Cavan-Monaghan) indicated that a fuller response on the need for progress in the negotiations would be useful and asked what steps she proposed to take to make the talks process fully comprehensive. He emphasised further the importance of progress on matters relating to prisoners and suggested that more resolute action was required.

**Dr Mowlam** replied that, as for the negotiations, the various participants could not be forced to talk to each other by the British and Irish Governments; the role of the two Governments was to facilitate such talks. The Labour Government had made it quite clear that it would not let the process ossify. In her opinion, significant movement had already taken place in respect of early releases and transfers, and other issues relating to prisoners.

**Dr Norman Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde) asked about the position of Loyalist prisoners in prisons on the mainland and whether there had been requests from Loyalist prisoners for transfers.

**Mr Andrew Robathan** (Blaby) asked what specific concessions had been made by Sinn Féin/IRA except to stop killing people.

**Senator Joe Costello** suggested that progress on the prisoners issue had been limited. There was no risk to the public in moving prisoners from one prison to another, unless they escaped; and the confidence of the public would on the whole be aided by such transfers rather than threatened. He asked whether transfers in some cases were held up because tariffs had been set.

**Mr Charles Flanagan** (Laois-Offaly) asked whether it was likely that any more prisoners would be transferred to Portlaoise before Christmas and whether there were any plans to relax the procedures governing Christmas parole.

**Senator Edward Haughey** said that wherever there was no progress, the *status quo* would hold. That would be undesirable.

**Dr Mowlam** agreed in response to the last point that progress was essential. She felt that progress had been made on the subject of prisoners. In response to Mr Flanagan, she indicated that it was hoped to transfer more prisoners before Christmas and that changes had been made which would increase eligibility for parole over Christmas. In response to Senator Costello, she agreed that there were hurdles to be overcome before prisoners could be transferred, but noted that measures to boost confidence among prisoners' families did not always help to build confidence elsewhere in the community. She suggested that it might be helpful if the British and Irish Governments could together produce an agreed statement on the situation with respect to prisoners and on the progress made, in order to forestall the danger that the issue could become a source of disagreement.

In response to Dr Godman, she confirmed that there were relatively few Loyalists in mainland prisons but that if genuine applications were received they would be

treated in the same way as other applications. In response to Mr Robathan, she cautioned against an approach to the problem which sought to count up the number of concessions by one side or the other; any measures which were taken should be taken because they were right.

#### *Joint Framework Document*

**Mr Kevin McNamara MP** (Hull North) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether she would confirm that the Joint Government Framework Document remained the negotiating position of both Governments in the current talks process.

**Dr Mowlam** replied that the Joint Framework Government Document remained the British and Irish Governments' current view of the most promising way forward, but she stressed that the way forward was a matter for the parties to the negotiations and if they came up with different proposals then that would present no problem.

**Mr Kevin McNamara** (Hull North) asked, in the context of confidence-building measures, when the Government intended to make an announcement about the events of Bloody Sunday, noting that there was pressure for a quick reply not only from the Irish Government but also from Members of the House of Commons.

**Dr Mowlam** indicated that she was aware of the pressure for a reply and that she would not want another anniversary of those events to go by without a statement having been made.

**Senator Paddy McGowan** pointed to the value of confidence-building measures, including measures relating to development in the Border areas, going ahead before agreement had been reached on all political issues.

**Dr Mowlam** recognised that point and noted that some useful projects had already been got under way.

**Senator Paschal Mooney** asked whether the Irish Government's decision to release their assessment of new material relating to Bloody Sunday to the public had been of assistance.

**Dr Mowlam** replied that it had not had any effect on the speed of the decision-taking process because there was no delay taking place.

#### *Gaelic Athletic Association and the security forces*

**Mr Jimmy Deenihan** (Kerry North) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she had had discussions with the Gaelic Athletic Association authorities in Northern Ireland regarding the improvement of relationships between the GAA and the security forces; and if she would make a statement.

**Dr Mowlam** replied that she had not yet held any discussions with the GAA.

**Mr Jimmy Deenihan** (Kerry North) suggested she should do so, noting the important part played by the GAA in the Nationalist community. He noted in particular the Association's concerns regarding the parades issue and the use of GAA grounds by the Crossmaglen security post.

**Dr Mowlam** said that she was aware of the issue relating to Crossmaglen. There should be no concerns about the parades legislation because sports events were exempted under Clause 3. She would be quite happy to meet the GAA, though she noted that it would be helpful if the GAA also met the RUC.

#### *Women's Groups in Northern Ireland*

**Mrs Maria Fyfe** (Glasgow Maryhill) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she had plans to meet women's groups in Northern Ireland.

**Dr Mowlam** replied that she had not yet met as many women's groups in Northern Ireland as she would like.

**Mrs Maria Fyfe** (Glasgow Maryhill) noted the work of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and asked what steps the Secretary of State was taking to assist the voice of women in Northern Ireland politics.

**Dr Mowlam** agreed with the tribute paid to the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. As for the wider political debate, it was not for her to dictate to the political parties; she was however well aware that women were making very practical contributions to the political process through other means.

**The Chairman** thanked the Secretary of State for her openness in speaking to the Body and, on their behalf, wished her success in her work.

**Mr Michael O'Kennedy took the Chair as Chairman.**

## **9. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

### **Motion made and Question proposed:**

That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of Committee D on Environmental Issues affecting the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (Doc No 53)-(**Mr Roger Stott**);

**Mr Roger Stott** (Wigan), moving the Motion, said that events had moved on since the Report. More waste had been found in Beaufort's Dyke, although the UK Government had said that the levels of radiation did not give cause for concern. He would welcome a bilateral agreement on nuclear safety. He welcomed the fact that the Ministry of Defence had amended a memorandum on the salvaging of nuclear submarines in the Irish Sea. The Committee's next Report would be on Sellafield and its effect on health.

**Dr Norman Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde) pointed out that the Secretary of State for Scotland had sent a report to all Scots MPs on the waste around Beaufort's Dyke. A number of MPs were pressing him to ensure that in order to protect fishermen and coastal communities the waste was removed.

**Mr John Home Robertson** (East Lothian) said that the material in Beaufort's Dyke was not a significant hazard. However, there was some material near the Isle of Arran that ought to be investigated. He said that the Secretary of State for Scotland's document should be made available to TDs.

**Ms Marian McGennis** (Dublin Central) said that the Committee would now like to look into the health implications of Sellafield power station and appealed for any members of the Body who had expertise in that area to communicate it to the Committee.

**And the Question being put:-It was agreed to.**

*Resolved*, That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of Committee D on Environmental Issues affecting the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (Doc No 53).

**Mr David Winnick resumed the Chair.**

## **10. ANIMAL HEALTH ISSUES**

### **Motion made and Question proposed:**

That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of Committee C on Animal Health Issues (Doc No 54)-(**Mr Seamus Kirk**);

**Mr Seamus Kirk** (Louth), moving the Motion, said that he was new to the Chair of the Committee. The decision to focus on animal health had been taken in the light of the BSE crisis. The Committee's Report had concluded that an all-Ireland programme of animal health should be agreed. It was understandable that this issue should be given priority by the Inter-Parliamentary Body. The Irish Government had welcomed the Report and was committed to full cooperation with the UK Government on the issue. He hoped that the Committee would revisit the subject as he felt there were lessons still to be learned.

**Mr Jimmy Deenihan** (Kerry North) congratulated the Committee on its Report. He agreed that the whole of Ireland was united on the issue of BSE and that considerable progress could be made. He was concerned about the recent blockade at Holyhead and appealed to MPs to intervene, because the incident sent out the wrong signals about UK and Irish cooperation.

**Mr John Ellis** (Sligo-Leitrim) said that, as one of those who had prepared the Report, he would like to thank those involved. He said that Europe would have to introduce a clinical test for BSE in order to restore consumer confidence.



**Mr Nick Ainger** (Carmarthen West and Pembrokeshire South) said that the disturbance at Holyhead had been an isolated incident, and those responsible would be pursued. The Secretary of State for Wales had condemned the perpetrators. The incident had worsened the situation rather than highlighting a particular concern. It had also undermined the UK's credibility; and as a Welsh MP he wholeheartedly condemned the actions of those involved. He said that it was important to get the export ban lifted, and that consumer confidence would follow this.

**Mr Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire) said that the incident at Holyhead had been an indication of the desperation of farming communities. There was a very strong case for a staged lifting of the export ban; lifting the ban in respect of Northern Ireland could be a first step.

**Mr John Home Robertson** (East Lothian) paid tribute to Liam Kavanagh, the ex-Chairman of the Committee. He said that the export ban had been disastrous for UK farmers and that it was imperative to eradicate the disease. The UK Government had been working hard on the issue and, as a result, the incidence of BSE was falling dramatically. The UK needed help to get a staged reopening of the export market; some factions in the European Communities seemed to be against this.

**Senator Edward Haughey** stated that there should be an all-Ireland programme of animal health. Both Northern Ireland and the Republic had had a good history of animal health, but that had been tainted by BSE. He urged the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food strongly to market Northern Irish beef in order to restore its image.

**Mr Kevin McNamara** (Hull North) thanked all those who had contributed to the Report, and hoped that the Committee would return to the issue of animal health. The political thrust for an all-Ireland system of animal health had been somewhat brushed off by the UK Government, although the Committee had found no great political objections to the concept. There had been some progress on the issue of flagging farms for BSE rather than herds, which had been unjust to farmers. He believed that progress could be made and that certification of herds was the way forward, although he was aware of the continuing effect of the disease on beef production and the beef market.

**And the Question being put: - It was agreed to.**

*Resolved*, That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of Committee C on Animal Health Issues (Doc No 54).

## **11. TOURISM**

**Motion made and Question proposed:**

That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of Committee B on Tourism (Doc No 55)-(Mr Nick Ainger);

**Mr Nick Ainger** (Carmarthen West and Pembrokeshire South) spoke as the only remaining member of the Committee. It was disappointing that both Governments had declined to welcome the suggestion of the Committee that an all-Ireland advisory committee be established. He did, however, welcome the Northern Ireland Office's recognition that it was important to establish an improved tourism infrastructure in the North. In general, both Governments had welcomed the Report.

**Senator Paddy McGowan** welcomed the Report and the Committee's idea of establishing an all-Ireland tourism organisation. Funding was also needed for regional tourism initiatives.

**Lord Rathcavan** said that it was unfortunate that the Irish Government did not consult the Northern Ireland authorities before making unilateral changes to the Tourism "Brand Ireland " Initiative. Such lack of cooperation would prejudice future projects.

**Mr Andrew Boylan** (Cavan-Monaghan) observed that the last two Reports by Committee B had concentrated on finding common ground between the North and the South and suggested that the Lakes District could be developed in a joint tourism project.

**Senator Helen Keogh** congratulated the Committee on the Report. She recalled that Dublin politicians had acted unwisely in seeking to alter the Tourism Brand logo.

**Senator Paschal Mooney** asked the Committee to concentrate a future inquiry on tourism in the 12 counties border region, an area of unique natural beauty.

**Dr Rory O'Hanlon** (Cavan-Monaghan) supported the suggestion of Senator Mooney. The Ulster canal could also be re-opened to provide further opportunities for tourism.

**Mr Nick Ainger** (Carmarthen West and Pembrokeshire South) had not been aware of the "Brand Ireland" furore. He suggested that the matters referred to in the debate were more appropriate for future study by Committee C rather than Committee B.

**And the Question being put:- it was agreed to.**

*Resolved*, That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of Committee B on Tourism (Doc No 55).

***The sitting was adjourned at 5.45 pm till tomorrow.***

**TUESDAY 2 DECEMBER 1997**

**The sitting was opened in public at 9.45 am in the Mountbatten Suite, Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London, with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.**

**The Chairman** regretted the late start of the session, and explained the business before the Body that day. The Steering Committee had decided against imposing a time-limit on speeches in the debate on Recent Political Developments, but members were asked to observe an informal limit of 5 minutes.

## **1. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS**

### **Motion made and Question proposed:**

That the Body commends the Irish and British Governments for their determination in pursuit of a lasting settlement in Northern Ireland and calls on all parties to engage with even greater urgency in the substantive negotiations at the All-Party Talks and help to ensure a successful outcome.-(**Mr Charles Flanagan.**)

**Mr Charles Flanagan** (Laois-Offaly ), moving the Motion, said that this had been an historic week for the island of Ireland, with the talks moving into a new dimension. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had given an impressive display of frankness and openness in her appearance before the Body on the previous day. In particular, her reference to political dialogue as the only means to achieve a full, long-term settlement was to be welcomed. It was unfortunate that there was no representation of the Unionists on the Body. Unionists should not feel threatened by the Body and, with the changes which had taken place through the talks process, it would be desirable for the Unionists to review their position and to join the Body.

Dr Mowlam's comments on issues such as prisoners, parades, Bloody Sunday and demilitarisation had been interesting. She had the opportunity to remove many sources of discontent from the political agenda. Progress had already been made on the prisoners issue, but Nationalists had fears about the proposed parades legislation. Dr Mowlam should look at this again before enactment of the legislation early in 1998. An independent inquiry into Bloody Sunday was also necessary, given the suspicions which existed about the Widgery Report.

The most difficult aspect of the current negotiation process was Strand 2. There was much controversy about the prospective powers of a North/South Body. Such a Body should not just be a talking shop; what was required was a real devolution of power from both the Irish and the UK Governments to the North/South body.

By engaging in political dialogue the participants in the peace process faced the challenge of exposing their arguments to critical analysis by others. This was the essence of the democratic process. All should have the courage to overcome their fears and prejudices.

### **Amendment proposed:**

In line 1, to leave out "Irish and British Governments for their determination in pursuit of a lasting settlement and calls on" and insert "positive efforts of the Irish and British Governments in the peace process, urges renewed determination on

their part in pursuit of a lasting settlement and calls on both Governments and"-(**Mr Caoimhghin Ó Caoláin**)-instead thereof.

**Mr Caoimhghin Ó Caoláin ( Cavan-Monaghan )**, moving the Amendment, said that the Body should not adopt the prescriptive approach contained in the Motion. The Body ought to spur on both Governments to remove obstacles from the peace process and to inject a sense of urgency into the process. Not all parties were engaging at the talks process. The British and Irish Governments needed to implement confidence-building measures and urge those who were not at the talks table to embrace change. The British Government also had the task of transforming its relationship with the Irish people. Existing constitutional legislation relating to Northern Ireland needed to be repealed in favour of a new political and constitutional dispensation.

His Amendment was intended to widen the content of the Motion to encompass the all-Ireland dimension of the process towards a settlement and to envisage a new Ireland/Great Britain relationship. The Motion as tabled did not reflect the three-strand approach and his Amendment, though minimal, was intended to address that issue. If the Body, after considering the issues raised by the Amendment-which was proposed in a constructive spirit-was not willing to accept it, he would not press it to a division.

**Rt hon Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster )** believed that he was the only person to have served as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who had such historical Unionist roots. In political terms, the months between the present time and May were a long time-but he was not sure if they would prove long enough. The talks would have to go round difficult corners and leaders would need to be courageous. He compared them to a game of cards in which opposing sides would have to be prepared to match each other card for card. Generosity would be needed just as the generosity of enemies to one of his Irish ancestors 350 years ago meant that he was alive to speak to the Body today.

**Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim)** recalled the speech of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and stressed that there would have to be mutual understanding of differing views for the talks to come to a successful conclusion. He outlined three points which needed to be addressed in the short term: equal treatment for Republican and Loyalist prisoners was essential, methods of policing in a constructive manner should be explored, and programmes of Targeted Social Need needed to be developed for all sides. These points could be addressed outside the main talks to improve the background against which the discussions were taking place.

**Mr David Wilshire (Spelthorne)** said that it was unusual for there to be no Wilshire Amendment to a Motion such as the one before the Body. The text of the Motion was acceptable, but he remained as pessimistic as ever about the outcome of the talks. Politicians were trying to square a circle. Unionists could not accept the concept of shared sovereignty but would, he hoped, welcome the recent apology

and retractions from the Irish Foreign Minister. Sinn Féin would not, or could not, accept that people in Northern Ireland alone would be asked to give their consent to any agreement. They would not accept any solution other than a United Ireland. If politicians insisted that the 1 May 1998 was the end of the talks then there would be blood on the streets.

He hoped that the Secretary of State was not speaking the truth when she denied that she was "dewy-eyed" about the talks process. If she was not dewy-eyed then she was being naïve in trying to give away part of the country. She talked about what decent people wanted: decent people wanted murderers locked up, illegal arms handed over and an end to torture and beating. He knew that he was far from alone in being appalled that the President of Sinn Féin was going to be "fêted" by the British Prime Minister; and it was reassuring to know that the Government in Dublin was not inclined to make similar arrangements for a meeting. In conclusion, he thanked the Body for allowing him to put his views without interruption.

**Mr Connor Lenihan** (Dublin South West) paid tribute to Peter Brooke and Caoimhghin Ó Caoláin for their participation in the debate. Mr Brooke had played a momentous part in the peace process and had made critical statements in turning violence towards peace. He despised the role of political correctness in the peace process, suggesting that the recent comments of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, David Andrews, had been a victim of that phenomenon.

Strong North/South institutions were the essential building blocks for constitutional change. The devil was still in the detail of the execution of the talks and the politicians needed to agree the principles and leave the detail for lawyers. The heady rhetoric of the peace process masked the reality of a need for an interim settlement in which no-one would be completely satisfied.

The release of prisoners was a very important factor in the peace process and no-one would deny the frustration which was created when the British Government did not act to release prisoners during the first cease-fire. Unlike David Wilshire, he was not pessimistic and did not wish to use old language to hark back to an earlier era. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had tried to use new language and the circumstances for the negotiations were now more propitious than ever before. The work of the leaders of Sinn Féin meant that the conflict was now over. The Body should seek to replicate relationships which were being built up in the course of the peace process and should fund an economic council to promote relationships between both North and South, and East and West.

**Mr Harry Barnes** (Derbyshire North East) found Mr Wilshire's pessimism excessive. The essential question was what the Unionists would be able to accept. They could not accept a breach of sovereignty, nor a suggestion that any cross-Border body should have executive powers. Many bodies in Great Britain, however, had executive authorities where legal sovereignty rested with the Government-and they worked effectively. Joint bodies could make decisions subject to ratification by a fast track process.

Communities needed to come together; in that respect, it was disastrous that the Democratic Unionist Party was not involved in the talks process. Strand 3 of talks should perhaps make use of the Body or of the Northern Ireland Forum.

**Mr John Browne** (Carlow-Kilkenny) said that he was not sure what difference the Amendment made to the Motion. He had listened to David Wilshire for the first time today, and pointed out that while Mr Wilshire saw Northern Ireland as part of the UK, he himself saw it as part of his own country. It was important to be realistic; people had extreme and differing views, and no one side would come out of the talks with exactly what it wanted. Cooperation was needed; the recent incident in Holyhead was not helping to engender trust. He appealed to those involved in the talks to keep listening to each other.

**Mr Denis Canavan** (Falkirk West) said that since the last meeting of the Body there had been changes of government on both sides of the Irish Sea and a welcome restoration of the cease-fire. It was unfortunate that the talks were being boycotted by some parties, and he hoped they would reconsider. He also hoped that the Unionists would participate in the work of the Body. The peace process could be helped by confidence building measures; for example demilitarisation, and the transfer of prisoners to allow them to serve sentences near their families. He hoped that the legislation to set up a Parades Commission, which was currently before the House of Lords, would prevent any repetition of recent scenes in Drumcree.

**Michael Ring** (Mayo) said that the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had brought a breath of fresh air to the peace process. Many Unionists were disappointed that their political representatives were not at the talks; and he hoped that all sides would sit down to talk soon.

**Mr Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire) appealed to both Governments to promote dialogue . One of the key problems was the absence of direct communication between the various parties and the two Governments. There was a dangerous perception that negotiation implied a rejection of one's original position. The two Governments had to make it clear that there was open access to decision makers for the people of Northern Ireland. In conclusion, he was optimistic about the progress of peace and reiterated that both Governments should continue to talk to each other.

**Senator Paddy McGowan** congratulated the Chairman on his well-managed approach to chairmanship. He had confidence in the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who was trying very hard to find a solution. He lived near the Border and had seen the serious consequences of the Troubles, so he supported the two Governments' efforts to reach a lasting settlement. The Irish Government was not in a position to encourage Unionists to take part in the talks; this was the responsibility of the UK Government. David Wilshire's comments had not been helpful; however, the Body had a useful contribution to make in influencing and encouraging both Governments.

**Mr Andrew Robathan** (Blaby) supported the Motion. He regretted the absence of the Unionists at the Body but explained that a Unionist might find the Body rather one-sided. If politicians wanted to heal wounds it might be better not to dwell on the past. The cease-fire had held for too short a period to inspire confidence. Dialogue was welcome but it was imperative that it be two-way.

**Mr Andrew Boylan** (Cavan-Monaghan) complimented the Chairman on his work. He welcomed the opportunity to renew old acquaintances and make new friends at the Plenary. The peace process would last because the people of Northern Ireland had had their fill of the Troubles and were experiencing simple freedoms for the first time in 25 years. There was common ground: for example, on agriculture, tourism and the common problem of unemployment.

**Lord Holme** said that it was important when studying the Motion and Amendment to realise that unity and enthusiasm, not just determination, were required from the two Governments. The Parades Bill had been debated in the House of Lords the previous day. There had been opposition on all sides to clause 3, which had tried to widen the issue of parades to include any issue involving a question of cultural identity, and as a result clause 3 was going to be withdrawn. He wished the Parades Commission well.

Any settlement arrived at in Strand 1 should guarantee the future rights of Unionists in the event that Northern Ireland joined the Republic of Ireland. The key issue in Strand 2 was not to revert to earlier models of co-administration but to work out how to guarantee the rights of both communities in Northern Ireland; the focus should be on what was useful on an all-Ireland basis rather than on symbolism. Given the importance of relations with the European Union, both the UK and the Republic had a joint interest in both economies marching forward together. There was a ferment of constitutional change in the UK after a long period of stasis; the present time was a good moment in which to consider adjusting relationships with the Republic of Ireland.

**Mr Jimmy Deenihan** (Kerry North) said that the Body should be focussing on fostering communication between the communities in Northern Ireland. In London, Dublin and Northern Ireland itself the peace dividend was clear. In Ireland North and South there was greater willingness between the communities to cooperate commercially and culturally. Those types of cooperation, which could take place outside a political settlement, could nevertheless underpin such a settlement. Valuable work was being pursued by Cooperation North and under the Interreg and IFI programmes; but a lot more could be done. The Committees of the Body should be playing a proactive role in Northern Ireland, inquiring into subjects relevant to the peace process, and building bridges between the communities. It would be a good idea to hold a Plenary in Northern Ireland and to invite Unionists at least to address the Body even if they were still not willing to join it.

**The Chairman** explained that one of Mr Deenihan's suggestions was already under consideration by the Steering Committee.

**Mr John Home Robertson** (East Lothian) agreed that the Border observation towers were unattractive, but pointed out that they were much grimmer from the inside than from the outside. It would be very foolish to stop maintaining proper supervision of Border areas: stockpiles of weapons and explosives still existed and there were other threats to security.

Mr Wilshire had expressed opposition to the meeting between the Prime Minister and Mr Gerry Adams. As an elected Member of the UK Parliament Mr Adams had as much right as any other Member to meet the Prime Minister and the meeting should go ahead. Mr Wilshire had also spoken about relinquishing part of his country. This was to misunderstand the nature of the United Kingdom, which was a union of nations, not a single nation. One of the most exciting aspects of the new Labour Government was its willingness to consider fundamental constitutional issues. That process of reconsideration was no less valid in the context of Northern Ireland.

**Senator Paschal Mooney** expressed his sense of privilege to be on the Body, wished the new Co-Chairmen well in their responsibilities and endorsed the tributes paid to the previous Co-Chairmen. While he understood that an essential part of the Body's work was to listen to potentially unwelcome views from other members, the comments made by Mr Robathan to the effect that the Republic was a safe haven for terrorist activities were the type of dangerous nonsense which fuelled Unionist prejudices. The Republic also had troops and police involved in Border duties. The Irish Army and the Gardaí not only cooperated with the RUC and the British Army but also protected against incursions from the North. In the past, when Irish Governments had tried to reduce security levels they had met with opposition from politicians and local community leaders.

There was a widespread perception within the Republic and the Northern Nationalist community that the Unionists would not have entered talks unless the British Government had adopted a resolute approach. This British Government had grasped the nettle and was working in the wider interests of people throughout the island of Ireland. The contribution of the USA in recent years was also to be commended. Senator Mitchell and Jean Kennedy Smith had both worked tirelessly. The rapid developments of the previous six weeks had given grounds for optimism rather than pessimism. There was a genuine willingness in the South to reach out to Unionist politicians. Some of the benefits of a settlement had already been pointed out by Andrew Boylan: a permanent peace, economic development in Belfast, Derry and the Border counties, and a sense of respect for other traditions and values. The current generation of political leaders would not be forgiven if a settlement was not reached.

**Mr Austin Currie** (Dublin West) said that after having spent twenty-five years in Northern politics and eight in Southern politics and having been a Minister in both jurisdictions, he would describe himself as a realist. The current discussions in Belfast were the best ever opportunity for a lasting solution to the problems of Northern Ireland. While the absence of the DUP was regrettable, all the parties which were essential to a solution were around the table. The assistance of the USA, Europe,



Canada, Australia and other contributors to the IFI were all extremely valuable to the process. Above all else, there was a determination among the people of Northern Ireland not to return to the problems of the last twenty-five years. If politicians failed to deliver peace there might be no recurrence of the favourable conditions which existed at the present time.

The policing problem in Northern Ireland was one of the most fundamental of all issues. When that had been solved, the wider problems would be close to a solution. When both communities in Northern Ireland were able to identify with the institutions of that society, one of the fundamental causes of the problems would have been addressed.

In relation to the referendums to be held in the North and the Republic it would be worth considering how to encourage people to vote positively. Both referendums were important, but it was also important that for the first time since 1918 people from the North and the South would express their views. It was to be hoped that support for new institutions emerging from a settlement would be given on an all-Ireland basis. Republicans might argue that no group should be able to oppose the mandate of the Irish people as a whole, while Loyalists might argue that a mandate given by the people of Northern Ireland should not be overturned. When the Irish people, North and South, had spoken together, their mandate would have to be upheld to ensure progress towards a peaceful solution.

Power-sharing was an essential element of any solution, so long as there was real power to share. It would be a positive development when representatives of both traditions in Northern Ireland were involved together in grappling with practical political problems.

Unionists feared that North/South bodies would have too much power, but as far back as 1974 the Dublin Government had been unwilling to give functions to the Council of Ireland; there was a vested interest in retaining power in Dublin as well as in Belfast.

In the context of the 1974 power-sharing executive, Cardinal Conway had been asked at the time in an RTE interview whether power-sharing meant that Nationalists accepted the British presence and the status quo, or whether it was to be a launching pad for a united Ireland. Cardinal Conway had replied that the answer should be left to history. The same answer was relevant today; if a package was agreed, and endorsed by the North and the South, then history should be left to judge how the present political generation had discharged its heavy responsibilities.

**Mr Kevin McNamara** (Hull North) congratulated his colleagues on their stamina at being able to attend both the dinner and the morning session. In summing up the debate, he said that the absence of the Unionists and the SDLP had deprived the debate of the authentic voice of the political parties in Northern Ireland. Those members of the Body from Northern Ireland who had spoken were from the mainland political parties. In that respect, the Body had played Hamlet without the

Ghost. His overriding impression of the debate was the overwhelming wish for talks to succeed. This was also the wish of those on the island of Ireland. It should not be forgotten that the worst atrocities of all the Troubles had taken place in the Republic.

He paid tribute to Peter Brooke and saw the talks process as the fruition of Mr Brooke's work as Secretary of State. His Whitbread Brewery speech had sown the seeds which encouraged Sinn Féin to come to the talks. The speech had been made at the time when Mrs Thatcher was Prime Minister; and it also showed her intelligent awareness of what needed to be said in Northern Ireland.

Strand 2, however much it was dressed up with words, was the real problem. Agreement on strands 1 and 3 was inextricably linked with the success of Strand 2. Without Strand 2 power sharing in the North could not go ahead. The Taoiseach had instructed Government Departments in Dublin to examine where they might have shared interest with Departments in the North. It remained to be seen whether similar instructions had been given to the Northern Ireland Office and Departments on mainland Britain.

Lord Holme had been right to call for lasting institutions. Many members had also noted the need for speed in negotiations. Elements in both communities would want to go back to the old ways and it was therefore important that both Prime Ministers had expressed the wish that the talks would conclude in May 1998. The devil would be in the detail and there was much work still to be done. If any message went out from the Body it should be that it wished the talks well but urged participants to pay attention to the details.

**The Chairman** thanked the Body for the concise contributions to the debate and asked Mr Ó Caoláin whether he wished to move his Amendment.

**Mr Caoimhghin Ó Caoláin** (Cavan-Monaghan) stood by his speech and said that he had noticed only one dissenting voice in the debate on his Amendment. As that dissent had been about his personal reasonableness and intent rather than the wording of the Amendment, he was minded to seek agreement but reminded the Body that he would withdraw it if there was any dissent.

**The Chairman** asked for an indication of whether the Body wanted the Amendment to proceed.

**Mr Charles Flanagan** (Laois-Offaly), speaking as the mover of the Motion, said that it had been his impression of the Body that forging consent was of paramount importance. He hoped that the newly-constituted Body did not wish to divide at the current session and suggested that the Motion should stand unamended.

**Mr Caoimhghin Ó Caoláin** (Cavan-Monaghan) stressed that he simply wished to emphasise the spirit of what he said in his contribution. He was unable to affirm the

construction of the Motion before the Body but could accept the spirit in which it was drafted.

**The Amendment was withdrawn.**

**And the Question being put:-It was agreed to** (with 2 abstentions: Mr Ó Caoláin and Mr Conor Lenihan).

*Resolved*, That the Body commends the Irish and British Governments for their determination in pursuit of a lasting settlement in Northern Ireland and calls on all parties to engage with even greater urgency in the substantive negotiations at the All-Party Talks and help to ensure a successful outcome.

## **2. STATEMENT BY CO-CHAIRMAN**

**Mr Michael O'Kennedy** (Tipperary North) informed the Body that the Holyhead blockade by farmers in Wales had been repeated in Fishguard. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had expressed his disappointment at the events of the previous night and had already contacted his counterpart in Dublin with a view to ensuring free movement of trade. He was sure that the views expressed in yesterday's meeting of the Body had been helpful.

**Mr John Home Robertson**, on a point of order, noted that the session had failed to start on time and had been significantly disturbed by the use of mobile telephones. Firm guidance was needed on the use of mobile telephones at future meetings of the Body.

**Mr Michael O'Kennedy took the Chair as Chairman.**

## **3. ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion made, and Question proposed:**

That the Body do now adjourn-(**Mr Charles Flanagan**);

**Mr Kevin McNamara** (Hull North) suggested that associate members should become more involved with Committees so that, like the Council of Europe, substitutes could participate in visits when regular members were unavailable.

**Mr John Ellis** (Sligo-Leitrim) supported that proposal.

**Mr David Winnick resumed the Chair**

**Mr Denis Canavan** (Falkirk West) said that several speakers had made reference to the possibility of a fresh invitation to the Unionists to join the Body or to address it.

**The Chairman** said that the Steering Committee would discuss this matter.

**Mr O'Kennedy (Vice-Chairman)** conveyed the thanks of the Irish delegation to the Chairman, the secretariat, and all those involved in organising the Plenary, which had been very useful, with opportunities to welcome new members and to renew old acquaintances. Mr O'Kennedy also expressed thanks to Mr Peter Temple-Morris for his past work for the Body.

**The Chairman** added his thanks to Amanda Hay, John Osborne, the secretariat from both countries and the two Clerks of the Body. He also expressed his gratitude to Mr Temple-Morris. He thanked members for their attendance, and wished them a Happy Christmas and New Year. The next Plenary Session would take place in Ireland between 29 and 31 March 1998. Members would be notified of the exact venue as soon as possible. He then closed the Fourteenth Plenary Session of the Body.

**And the Question being put:-It was agreed to.**

*Resolved,* That the Body do now adjourn.

**The session concluded at 12.05 pm.**

## **WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

### *Counter-terrorism legislation*

**Mr John Ellis** (Sligo-Leitrim): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will take steps to ensure that the proposed UK wide counterterrorism legislation, including provisions relating to arrival and departure in the UK, will not be directed or applied against the Irish community in a discriminatory manner; and if she will make a statement.

**Dr Mo Mowlam:** My Right honourable Friend the Home Secretary and I intend to publish a consultation document early next year on proposals for new permanent UKwide counter terrorism legislation to replace the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act. In this document we will include proposals on the Ports Powers. Interested parties will then have a three month period in which to submit their views. In general it is our policy to ensure that legislation does not discriminate against any particular group.

### *The Commonwealth*

**Mr Harry Barnes** (Derbyshire North East: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will make a statement on the possible advantages and disadvantages to the Northern Ireland talks process of the Republic of Ireland rejoining the Commonwealth.

**Dr Mo Mowlam:** I believe it is a matter for the Government of the Republic of Ireland to decide whether to apply to rejoin the Commonwealth, and I do not think it would be right or helpful to become involved in that.

### *Bloody Sunday*

**Mary Coughlan** (Donegal South West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, why the British Government has not yet responded to the Irish Government's assessment of the new material relating to Bloody Sunday; and if the British Government will repudiate the Widgery Report and take steps to establish what happened on that day

**Dr Mo Mowlam:** The document handed to the British Government ran to nearly 150 pages. The material it contained requires detailed examination by officials in a number of Departments. That examination is not yet complete; as soon as it is, an announcement will be made. I can not preempt that decision

### *Security forces*

**Mr Seamus Kirk** (Louth): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether there will be a reduction in security force profile and activity in response to the new climate of peace in Northern Ireland, if there are any plans to reduce helicopter activity and military patrolling in Nationalist areas and whether the continuing need for security installations will be addressed

**Dr Mo Mowlam:** Since the Provisional IRA cease-fire in July 1997 an extensive range of de-escalatory measures has been introduced in every area of Northern Ireland. These measures include a reduction in helicopter activity and military patrolling in Nationalist areas, as witnessed by the relocation of 250 soldiers of the Parachute Regiment to their home base in Great Britain and the Chief Constable's decision to cease to use military support for RUC patrols during daylight hours in West Belfast. It should be remembered that terrorist groups such as the Irish National Liberation Army, the Continuing Army Council and the Loyalist Volunteer Force have not declared a cease-fire. Levels of Police and Army activity are kept under constant review and will be commensurate with the threat posed to the Security Forces and, more importantly, to the public.

### *All-Party Talks*

**Mr Tony Killeen** (Clare): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she is satisfied with the progress of the All-Party talks to date; and if she will make a statement.

**Dr Mo Mowlam:** I refer to the answer I gave to Mr McNamara.

### *Fair employment*

**Mr Michael Ring** (Mayo): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she accepts the main recommendations in the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights review on fair employment; and if she will make a statement

**Dr Mo Mowlam:** The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights has provided a major Report on employment equality which includes over 160 recommendations. The Government is giving full consideration to the Report and intends to issue a full document in the New Year. SACHR has put forward many constructive recommendations for greater employment equality and I have already accepted a number of these, of which perhaps the most important is the commitment to clarify the law on direct recruitment from the long term unemployed.

#### *EU Peace Programme*

**Senator Paddy McGowan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she is satisfied that the EU Peace Programme is making a contribution to Peace and Reconciliation; and if she will make a statement

**Dr Mo Mowlam:** The aim of the Peace Programme is to achieve sustainable economic and social outcomes which underpin peace and reconciliation, promoting both crosscommunity and crossborder development. Not only does the Programme bring lasting benefit to the community, but the support for peace and reconciliation shown by the EU through this Programme sends an important signal to Northern Ireland at this time.

The inclusive processes involved in the implementation of the Programme, such as the District Partnerships, have achieved a great deal in bringing together individuals and groups from all parts of the community

The EU has had a special relationship with Northern Ireland for many years, particularly through the single programme, the Peace Programme and the International Fund for Ireland. We very much appreciate the efforts of the three Northern Ireland MEPs, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the services of the UK and Irish Governments in Brussels in their continuing support for the Peace Programme

#### *Transfers of prisoners*

**Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly):** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will make it her policy that, wherever possible, prisoners should be permitted to serve their sentences closer to their families; and when more transfers of Republican prisoners from Britain to Ireland can be expected.

**Dr Mo Mowlam:** The British Government will honour its obligations under the Convention for the Transfer of Sentenced Persons to allow prisoners to serve their sentences close to their family where possible. My Right honourable Friend the Home Secretary has recently agreed the repatriation of three Republican prisoners to the Republic of Ireland. This will mean that nine Republican prisoners have been repatriated since 1995. Further cases remain under discussion between the two Governments.

#### *Public Processions etc (Northern Ireland) Bill*

**Mr Dinney McGinley** (Donegal South West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, why the concept of customary routes has been included in the Public Processions etc (Northern Ireland) Bill, and if she will include the requirement that demographic changes be taken into account when determining parade routes.

**Dr Mo Mowlam**: The North Report mentioned that whether a parade or its route is longstanding should be one of the factors to be taken into account in coming to a determination. In each case the Parades Commission will have to balance all factors before coming to a decision, factors which will include public order and a new factor of the impact of a particular parade on relationships within the community.