



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

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

EIGHTTEENTH PLENARY SESSION

29 and 30 March 1999

Dromoland Castle, Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co. Clare

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

(Produced by the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association)

Monday, 29 March 1999

The sitting was opened in public at 10.25 am in Dromoland Castle, Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co. Clare, with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The meeting is now in public session. I welcome everyone, especially those who were not here yesterday evening. I remind Members to turn off pagers or mobile phones.

1. ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS, AS AMENDED

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I move:

That the proposed programme of business, as amended, be adopted.

The amendment is a technical one and relates to tomorrow's motion which refers to the agreements following the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference which were signed on 8 March in Dublin Castle by both Governments and welcome the approval expressed in both parliaments. The reason "expressed in" is included is because the procedure followed in the House of Commons is not allowed for in the format of the original motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered, That the proposed Programme of Business for the current Session, as amended, be approved.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The proceedings of the Body do not incur parliamentary privilege. In accordance with Rule 2a the following Associate Members have accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for the entire Session: Mr Seán Doherty TD, Mr John Browne TD (Carlow-Kilkenny), Senator Enda Bonner, Ms Jean Corston MP, Mr Jeff Ennis MP, Ms Helen Jackson MP, Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP, Lord Glentoran and Baroness O'Cathain. I ask Members who wish to speak on tomorrow's motion to give their names to a Clerk. The Chair must take these names into account and balance both sides.

2. AMENDMENT TO THE RULES

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The report of the Steering Committee on proposals for the Amendment to the Rules, Document No. 62, has been circulated to Members.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Hull North): I move:

That the amendments to Rules 29, 32 and 34, and the consequential amendments to Rules 33 and 34, be made with immediate effect.

These amendments arose out of the embarrassing position we had at York and out of the establishment of the *ad hoc* Working Group. When we went into private session at York, the guests present from the States of Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man had to leave even though we had invited them to attend. This first amendment is to give the Co-Chairmen discretion to allow official guests remain when we are in private session. The second amendment arises from the need to formalise the workings of the *ad hoc* Working Group examining the future of the Body. It is a straightforward technical amendment.

I should mention that a statement will be distributed later, which some Members of the English Parliament have signed, expressing support for the Good Friday Agreement and hoping for a happy outcome this week.

Maria Fyfe (*Glasgow Maryhill*): What Parliament did you say?

Mr McNamara: The British Parliament. We live in hope that we too might get independence one day and get rid of our colonial trappings. If colleagues could sign the statement we would be grateful.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered, That the Amendments to Rules 29, 32 and 34 and consequential amendments [Doc. No. 62] be made with immediate effect.

3. STATEMENT BY MR JOHN O'DONOGHUE TD, MINISTER FOR JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): As we have concluded our preliminary business I am happy to welcome the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr John O'Donoghue TD, who is representing the Irish Government. Mr O'Donoghue will first make a statement on the broad issues and then answer questions which have been submitted. The time allotted for this is one and a half hours in total so I ask Members to co-operate in the presentation of the questions to enable us take as many questions as we possibly can following the Minister's statement. As we are to conclude at 12 noon we have only one and a half hours to conclude this Session's business.

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr John O'Donoghue TD: Chairpersons, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to be here this morning to address the Plenary Session of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body on behalf of the Irish Government. As a member of the Government I am keenly aware and appreciative of the invaluable role the Body has played over the years in developing relations between parliamentarians in both our countries; and as a former member of the Body I have fond memories of many such occasions.

By accident or design, the Body is meeting at a very significant point in the evolution of the Northern Ireland peace process. One year on from the Good Friday Agreement, it is an auspicious moment to assess progress since that historic

breakthrough, and in particular progress on implementing the Agreement. At the same time, as we are all well aware, one element of that implementation - the establishment of the institutions envisaged in the Agreement - has been held up for some time by the difficulties relating to the decommissioning of illegal weapons and the establishment of the executive. The efforts to resolve this impasse, involving both Governments and the Northern Ireland parties, are reaching a new intensity this week in Belfast, even as we speak. I will return to these efforts later.

When the Body met in the Extraordinary Plenary in Dublin in May last year, and then in York in September, you reviewed the tremendous progress which had been made, first in the Agreement itself and then in putting it into action. The historic referendums in both parts of Ireland on 22 May 1998 gave all of the people of this island, for the first time in living memory, the opportunity to decide openly and collectively on their political future. The overwhelming support they gave to the Agreement removed for ever any claim of historical legitimacy for the use of violence to resolve political differences. It also gave the Agreement a strength and legitimacy of its own which none of its opponents have been able to impugn, and which has stood it in good stead in the period since then.

The elections to the new Northern Ireland Assembly in June led to the election on 1 July of David Trimble and Seamus Mallon as First Minister and Deputy First Minister designate, and in partnership together they have become the public face of the new Northern Ireland.

Since you met at York, there has been to some extent a public perception of a loss of momentum, with some going so far as to claim that nothing has been happening. Nothing could be further from the truth. A great deal of work has been done and much has been achieved in implementing the far-reaching changes called for in the Good Friday Agreement.

The timetable envisaged in the Agreement was highly ambitious and exacting, as it had to be in the face of the very considerable and urgent problems of Northern Ireland. It is instructive to remember that the comparatively straightforward process - comparatively, I hasten to say in this company - of devolving power from Westminster to Scotland and Wales warranted a gap of some 20 months between the referendums and the establishment of devolved administrations.

There has indeed been some slippage in the timetable. This is not exactly surprising in a process as complex as this, where every issue has to be negotiated among half a dozen or more parties. Some of that slippage has been due to the difficulty over decommissioning, which has indeed proved difficult to resolve. Unfortunately, because it has delayed the establishment of the Executive, and thus of the other institutions and the transfer of powers to the Assembly, the disagreement over this one aspect of the Agreement has tended to overshadow the strides made in implementing other aspects of the Agreement.

A Northern Ireland Assembly in which both Unionists and Nationalists will share power, a North/South Ministerial Council with implementation bodies, and the amendment of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution were some of the elements in the Agreement which we were told for years could never be accepted by one side or the other. Yet, like the dog that did not bark, there has been very little opposition to them in the end - all of the difficulties have arisen elsewhere. The lesson is clear: people have accepted the Agreement for what it is - a genuine compromise between the requirements of all sides.

The task of negotiating among so many parties a completely new departmental structure for the government of Northern Ireland has not only been a very complex task but also a highly political balancing act, since all of the major parties in the Assembly will have a share in government. At the same time, these same parties were negotiating with the Irish Government on the equally complex task of designating the areas which would come under the North/South Ministerial Council, either through co-operation between existing agencies or through new implementation bodies.

This process involved detailed negotiation of the composition, remit, mandate and detailed characteristics of the bodies involved. It was a process that involved, on our side, almost every member of the Irish Government and every Government Department. I have to say also that it was a process which was tackled with enthusiasm and imagination by a great many people - politicians and public servants on both sides - not one of whom, despite what one might have expected, adopted a minimalist or turf-guarding approach to the task in hand. The agreement reached on 18 December on the new Government Departments and the implementation bodies which involved the two Governments and the parties, should be seen as a truly remarkable achievement and as the culmination of a huge amount of work and a marathon negotiation, most of it conducted away from the public eye.

The ten new Departments in Northern Ireland will cover: Agriculture and Rural Development; Environment; Regional Development; Social Development; Education; Higher and Further Education; Enterprise, Trade and Investment; Culture, Arts and Leisure; Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Finance and Personnel. In addition, there will be an office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, which will also have an economic policy unit and special responsibility for equality matters.

Mundane as it might seem to those outside politics, this is what it is all about, part of the great prize offered by the Agreement. Every politician wants to be able to direct or influence the matters which can make a positive difference to their constituents' lives. That is why we are all here. Politicians in Northern Ireland who have spent up to 30 years essentially in opposition, without any practical opportunity of exercising parliamentary or ministerial responsibility, will now have the challenge, the reward and the brickbats which are our normal stock in trade. They are ready and eager to take up that challenge.

Although its powers have yet to be devolved to it, the Northern Ireland Assembly has been sitting in shadow form since the elections last summer. It is clear to any observer that all of the parties represented, including those opposed the Agreement, have brought to the Chamber a seriousness of purpose and an eagerness to engage in real politics which has surprised many.

The Agreement of 18 December also set out the six areas in which North-South implementation bodies are to be established. These include: waterways; food safety; trade and business development; EU programmes; aquaculture, angling and marine tourism and the Irish language, Ullans and Ulster Scots. Finally, the areas in which co-operation will be promoted through existing bodies will include transport, agriculture, education, health, environment and tourism.

In many other areas the implementation of the Agreement is being taken forward steadily with less publicity. On 1 March this year the new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission came into being, replacing the existing Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights. This Commission has more powers than the previous Standing Advisory Committee. In this jurisdiction, the establishment of the similar Commission provided for by the Agreement represents a new departure. There have been extensive consultations with interested non-governmental organisations and the Government's outline proposals have been published. Copies of these proposals are with the secretariat should Members wish to examine them. I anticipate that the necessary legislation will be enacted before the summer.

The Independent Commission on Policing under Chris Patten, established on 3 July 1998, engaged in an exhaustive series of public meetings during the second half of 1998 and is now engaged in a more deliberative phase. The Commission is aiming to report this summer. The Political and Security Committee of the Body met Mr Patten and the Commission recently. The importance of future policing arrangements for Northern Ireland cannot be underestimated. Accordingly, the Commission's task is critical and highly sensitive.

On 16 February the Northern Ireland Assembly formally approved the report of the First and Deputy First Ministers containing the agreement on the Government Departments and the implementation bodies. The vote in favour of these radical proposals was a solid 77 to 29, in other words, much the same as in the referendum and the Assembly elections. The Agreement remains the choice of the great majority of people in Northern Ireland as the way forward.

On 8 March in Dublin Castle my colleague David Andrews, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, signed four international agreements, supplementary to the Good Friday Agreement, which provided for the establishment of the North-South Ministerial Council, the implementation bodies, the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. With the passage of legislation in both Parliaments to give force to these agreements, all of the complex technical arrangements to put

in place the institutional architecture of the Agreement have finally been completed. It has been an enormous task.

The problem is that although we now have all the chess pieces on the board, we have not yet managed to find a way of commencing full political engagement in earnest. This will not happen until such time as the new Executive is up and running which, in turn, requires us to unblock the decommissioning log-jam. These issues will be the subject of intensive political engagement this week when the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister travel to Belfast to try, once again, to move things forward. I will be travelling to Belfast later today to participate in this endeavour, which means that, unfortunately, I will be obliged to leave you as soon as our business this morning has been completed. As some of you will know, it would not ordinarily be my wish to depart too early from meetings of this distinguished Body, of whose gatherings I have many fond memories.

Is there a way forward? Can we somehow break the deadlock? It is fair to say that none of us going to Belfast today can say with certainty what the outcome will be. There are various ideas and suggestions but I do not think it would be prudent if, this morning of all mornings, I proceeded to speculate publicly about the prospects that one or other suggestion, or set of suggestions, will carry the day, so to speak. Nor would it be particularly helpful if I were to make public pronouncements about who should do what and when, what particular moves or actions should come before others and so on.

I am in no doubt that there is the will all round to find a way forward now, or in the near future. There is also no doubt that it is the absolute wish and desire of all right thinking people on these islands to do so. Despite the appalling tragedy of Omagh and some other tragic but, thankfully, relatively isolated events since the Good Friday Agreement was reached, people have again got a sense of what real peace can be like. They do not want to go back now. We simply cannot contemplate failure.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I thank the Minister for his comprehensive if brief address which brings us up to date with the efforts of both Governments up to today and for the rest of this week. Without anticipating the issue we will discuss tomorrow on the political motion, I can say that the Minister can feel confident that this Body, as ever, will be sensitive in its approach and understanding of the sensitivities, particularly those which the Governments have to face. The Body will also be as supportive as is appropriate of the efforts of the Governments and all political parties to implement the final stages of the Good Friday Agreement. We appreciate the Minister's address, as a long-established former Member and friend. As soon as the Minister leaves us this morning he will travel to Belfast along with ministerial colleagues. We convey our good wishes to his colleagues in both Governments.

4. QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The Minister has agreed to take questions. We are anxious to ensure that as many questions as possible can be taken and the Minister has indicated that he is anxious to take as many questions as possible. The Minister proposes to group question 2 and 5 in the names of Senator Costello and Dr Norman Godman respectively. He also proposes to take question 10 and 14 together. For the purpose of expediency and optimum use of time, I will call the question and ask the questioner to signify his or her presence. If the questioner is present, the Minister will proceed to reply to the relevant question immediately. I call question no. 1.

Western European Union

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey) asked the Minister what consideration his Government has given to the Republic of Ireland becoming a full member of the Western European Union.

Mr O'Donoghue: Ireland does not intend to seek full membership of the WEU. Following the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, Ireland took up observer status at the WEU in response to an invitation by the WEU Council of Ministers. On the basis of the relationship created between the European Union and the WEU in the Maastricht Treaty whereby the EU could ask the WEU to elaborate on and implement actions of the EU which have defence implications, observer status has been a positive experience for Ireland, particularly in the light of the growing focus of the EU and WEU on peacekeeping and crisis management tasks - areas in which Ireland has been active since joining the United Nations. The Amsterdam Treaty which is due to come into force before the summer will give further focus to the WEU's role in peacekeeping and crisis management through the so-called Petersberg Tasks. The observers at the EU are Denmark and the four non-allied EU nations, namely Ireland, Austria, Finland and Sweden.

Mr Colvin (Romsey) : I thank the Minister for his reply. He will be aware that the Maastricht Treaty included agreement on the development of a common foreign and security policy and the eventual formation of a common defence policy which might in time "lead to a common defence". That has implications for EU members such as Finland, Austria, Sweden and Ireland which have a tradition of neutrality. Is the Irish Government in favour of the integration of the WEU into the EU, thereby giving the EU a common defence role?

Mr O'Donoghue: Ireland sees no conflict between the objective of the Maastricht Treaty and its military neutrality. Military neutrality has been a feature of Irish foreign policy for several decades. The fact that Ireland is maintaining military neutrality does not mean it has not engaged or does not engage in peacekeeping measures throughout the world. Indeed, some 75 Irish people have been killed on duty in peacekeeping measures throughout the world. As we speak, Ireland has an Army battalion serving in the Lebanon.

It is probably fair to say that the debate on European security and defence which is currently taking place within the EU, including ideas regarding a merger of the EU and WEU, is more properly a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. However, I understand that a merger, which is a highly complex institutional issue, could raise difficulties for a number of States, both within and outside of the European Union. It is felt that Article 5 of the WEU Treaty is a complicating factor. Members of the WEU must subscribe to an automatic mutual defence commitment contained in that Article. It is our view that membership of the WEU would not be compatible with a policy of military neutrality.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): As there do not appear to be any supplementary questions on this matter, we will move on to questions 2 and 5.

British-Irish Council

Senator Joe Costello asked the Minister when it is proposed to establish the British-Irish Council, the Council of the Isles, where it will be located and the range of its activities and functions.

Dr Norman A Godman (*Greenock and Inverclyde*) asked the Minister what recent discussions have taken place with the United Kingdom Government concerning matters relating to the British-Irish Council.

Mr O'Donoghue: I propose to take questions 2 and 5 together. Following discussions between the two Governments and consultations with the parties in Northern Ireland, the supplementary international agreement providing for the establishment of the British-Irish Council was signed in Dublin on 8 March by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The legislative framework for the establishment of the Council is therefore now in place.

In accordance with the terms of the British-Irish Agreement and the supplementary agreements signed in Dublin, the British-Irish Council, together with the North-South Ministerial Council, the implementation bodies, the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the devolution of legislative and executive powers to the Assembly will take place at the same time as the entry into force of the British-Irish Agreement. It is the hope of the Irish and British Governments that once the present difficulties regarding decommissioning and the establishment of the shadow Executive are resolved, all the necessary arrangements for the entry into force of the British-Irish Agreement can be rapidly completed, thereby allowing the first meetings of the British-Irish Council and the other institutions to take place.

The two Governments have also been making preparations at official level for the operation of the British-Irish Council. Suggestions regarding the procedural working of the Council and its initial work programme have been put to the parties in Northern Ireland. It will be for the members of the Council, once it is established, to take final decisions on these matters. In addition to consultations with the parties in Northern Ireland, both Governments have held informal preliminary discussions with

the other potential members of the Council. The Irish Government has taken the step of opening new Consulates-General in Edinburgh and Cardiff in order to develop contacts and relations with the new devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.

It is difficult at this early stage before a devolved administration has come into being in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales to predict exactly how the British-Irish Council will operate in practice. However, it will have the potential to discuss practical projects of co-operation between member States across the range of areas in which it is competent. It is envisaged at this stage that meetings of the British-Irish Council both at summit level and the level of sectoral meetings of Ministers will be hosted by the various members of the Council and held in different locations. However, due to the disparities in size of the participating administrations, it is not suggested that there should be any strict rotation of meeting locations.

Senator Costello: The British-Irish Council reflects more than any other institution the totality of relations between East and West and the new devolved institutions which are being established. I would like the Minister to offer some clarification on the ongoing talks concerning the character, membership and structure envisaged for the Council. You mentioned that a draft presentation had been put to the parties in Northern Ireland. Obviously nothing will happen until the Assembly and other institutions are in place. Will there be an opportunity for the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body to have an input into the character and structure of this and is an inter-parliamentary tier envisaged that might have some reflection on this particular Body? On locations, is a standing secretariat envisaged in each of the sovereign Governments, bodies or institutions?

Mr O'Donoghue: To answer Senator Costello's last question first, decisions have not been reached regarding locations. However, it is envisaged that there will be a sufficiency of geographical spread to enable everyone to feel that the arrangement is inclusive.

Regarding the future of this Body and its relationship with the BIC, my understanding is that this Body has set up a Working Party to consider the future of the Body in the context of the British-Irish Agreement. I envisage proposals from the Body as to how it envisages its role in terms of the new structures which have been provided for in the Agreement. This Body has played a very instructive and invaluable role in the context of the development of relations between the two islands and it is important for dialogue to continue at this level. However, it would be presumptuous of me to say how the matter should progress from here. Both Governments look forward to the proposals which will emanate from the Body as to how matters should progress in terms of the Body's future role, which no doubt will be intrinsically valuable as it was in the past.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The question the Minister has addressed is understandably a matter of concern. Under item 9 on the agenda, there will be a brief oral report from both Co-Chairmen on the work to date of the Working Group. We will then indicate what programme will be followed over the next few months.

Poverty in Rural Areas

Maria Fyfe (*Glasgow, Maryhill*) asked the Minister what proposals he has for dealing with poverty in rural areas.

Mr O'Donoghue: There are a broad range of initiatives in progress to deal specifically with the issues of rural poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. In 1997 the Irish Government launched the National Anti-Poverty Strategy for the purpose of tackling poverty and social exclusion as one of the major challenges facing Irish society. The NAPS is a major cross-departmental policy initiative by Government designed to place the needs of the poor and socially-excluded among the issues at the top of the national agenda in terms of Government policy development and action. The overall target is over the period 1997-2007, when the Strategy will aim at considerably reducing the numbers who are consistently poor from 15.9 per cent to less than 10 per cent as measured by the ESRI. The NAPS is a broad strategic policy approach based on the five key themes of educational disadvantage, unemployment, income adequacy, disadvantaged urban areas and rural poverty. Institutional arrangements to implement the strategy have been introduced which include the preparation of baseline statements and annual work plans by all Departments. A key feature of the policy response has been the introduction of poverty-proofing procedures into all aspects of Government policy formulation to ensure that these policies do not include any action which would adversely affect those living in or at risk of poverty.

The Government has also entered into a national agreement with the social partners, Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness, which has among its objectives ensuring that Irish society becomes more inclusive, that long-term unemployment is substantially reduced and that the benefit of growth is more equally distributed. The agreement contains a comprehensive range of commitments by Government to achieve these aims, many of which relate to rural problems. In addition, new developments in local government will facilitate the targeting of supports to those most in need. Closer co-operation between local groups and public authorities will improve the service to rural dwellers and ensure equity, effectiveness and the delivery of assistance. More specifically, the Government has established the Western Development Commission on a statutory basis. This will specifically target seven of the most under-developed counties in the west and north west. A western investment fund has also been established to help the Commission in its function of promoting economic and social development of the west. Measures operated by the Department of Agriculture and Food include income support through the operation of, *inter alia*, headage and premia payments. Other targeted initiatives being implemented include training schemes, the establishment of an expert working group on childcare, a pilot programme on the integrated provision of public services as well as support for community and local development groups. A Government White Paper on rural development is currently being drafted. This will deal with rural development as a multi-dimensional integrated process involving the economic, social, cultural and environmental conditions which influence the quality of life in rural communities. The White Paper

will endorse the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and contain a strong focus on addressing poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.

The Government is currently preparing a national development plan in the context of the next round of Structural Funds. In addition to enhancing productive potential and contributing to balanced regional development, the objective of the plan is to contribute to continue the growth in sustainable employment and to reintegrate the long-term unemployed, and those at risk of becoming so, into the economic mainstream.

A briefing document on Government activity in the area of rural exclusion is available from the secretariat.

Maria Fyfe (*Glasgow Maryhill*): I thank the Minister for a very comprehensive answer. In Britain we have only recently introduced social inclusion partnerships and the New Deal. We are just about to embark on introducing a statutory minimum wage. When Committee C last met in Iveagh House we heard evidence of a large number of agricultural workers who earned less than the statutory minimum wage for workers in agriculture. I would be interested to hear about the difficulties the Government had in enforcing the statutory minimum wage.

Mr O'Donoghue: I have outlined a number of measures which the Government has undertaken in order to deal with social exclusion, not least the implementation of a national development plan. The national development plan is of crucial importance to Ireland, particularly to those parts of the country, including my own constituency, which have been excluded from Objective One status. The objective of the Government is to look at those parts of the country which have been excluded from Objective One status, but which can be described as black-spots, to try to compensate for their non-inclusion in the Objective One areas. As the honourable Member has pointed out, we are anxious to proceed to a national minimum wage across the board. It is often forgotten that, to a large extent, rural poverty is often concentrated in certain estates on the fringes of rural or provincial towns where people have no property and sometimes many of them depend on social welfare payments. It is necessary to look at these areas and the problems for these people to try to progress the issue of social inclusion.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I welcome what the Minister said. Is he concerned that as the Government withdraws increasingly from providing services in Ireland - for example, postal services, transport, the threatened removal of the cap on the size of shopping centres in large areas (which would ultimately lead to the closure of small corner shops) and despite the indications that poverty-proofing is across Government Departments - that this is a threat to the future fabric of rural Ireland?

Mr O'Donoghue: The Government has illustrated on more than one occasion its commitment to the maintenance of the population in rural areas and it is in no way disposed towards withdrawing essential services from such areas. I do not envisage

the Government becoming involved in the removal of mainstays, such as the Senator has mentioned, in rural areas.

The objective of programmes such as LEADER has been the opposite: it is to maintain the population in rural areas which is becoming increasingly more difficult. There has been a greater level of centralisation in recent years and not only is there a drift towards the major cities but also towards the larger towns in rural areas. The challenge facing the Government is to continue with the social inclusion measures I have outlined in order to reverse that trend.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I hope Deputy Brendan Smith understands we have to move on because of the extensive questions and I hope to accommodate him at some other point.

The Dublin and Monaghan bombings of May 1974

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (*Cavan-Monaghan*) asked the Minister if the Irish Government will initiate a full independent inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of May 1974.

Mr O'Donoghue: I received a request for the establishment of a tribunal of inquiry into the Dublin-Monaghan bombings from a committee of victims and relatives of those killed or injured. The bombings which took place in Dublin and Monaghan on Friday, 17 May 1974 were among the most appalling outrages in the history of this island. The three car bombs exploded without prior warning and within a few minutes of each other at approximately 5.30 pm in the centre of Dublin. The bombs which had been placed in Parnell Street, Talbot Street and South Leinster Street resulted in 26 people being killed. At 6.58 pm a fourth no-warning car bomb exploded outside Greacen's pub on the North Road in Monaghan town resulting in a further seven people being killed. More than 240 people required hospital treatment as a result of the four bombs. Not only did the bombings result in 33 lives being lost, but a great many more lives of the injured and their friends and relatives were scarred forever.

The bombings were the subject of an intensive Garda investigation over a protracted time. Those investigations involved extensive interviewing of potential witnesses, forensic examination of the scenes of the explosions and of items recovered and contact with the RUC. Confidential information available to the Gardaí at the time also led the investigation team to examine evidence against a number of Loyalist suspects. Unfortunately, despite these intensive inquiries it was not possible to bring charges against any person at that time due to a lack of sufficient evidence to bring the matter to court.

In July 1993, a television documentary on the bombings was broadcast which purported among other things to identify the culprits. Following this broadcast, a review of the investigation was carried out in 1974 as part of new Garda inquiries into the events of May 1974. Those inquiries involved interviewing the programme

makers, persons who appeared on the programme and other persons whom the Gardaí believed might be able to assist with the new investigation with the assistance of police forces in other jurisdictions, where necessary. The overall outcome of these interviews was that no new evidence came to light and no information was received which would lead to any person being made amenable to the crimes in question, despite the assertions made on the programme.

While one cannot have anything but sympathy for those affected, I am unconvinced that the form of inquiry sought by the committee of victims and relatives would be the right course of action to take. It is important not to overlook the fact that the Garda investigation file on these bombings remains open. The objective of any Garda investigation is to secure evidence sufficient to bring before the courts those believed to be responsible; and that is not something which can be achieved by a tribunal of inquiry. While evidence has not been obtained to date on which a prosecution could be based, the position is that if any new information should emerge which might bring the culprits to justice it would be rigorously pursued by the Garda.

Since my appointment I have been anxious to do everything I can to address the needs of those who have suffered as a result of violent action associated with the conflict in the North. I obtained Government approval last May for the establishment of the Victims Commission headed by the former Tánaiste, Mr John Wilson, who was asked to identify the further measures to be taken to acknowledge and address the suffering and concerns of these persons and, in particular, the needs and concerns of victims and the families of victims of violence connected with the Dublin-Monaghan bombings. I understand Mr Wilson has consulted with the victims and relatives of victims of the Dublin-Monaghan bombings on a number of occasions in the course of his work and that he hopes to be in a position to submit his report soon. I will give careful consideration to the contents of the report when it is to hand.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan): I record continuing concern that we are almost on the eve of the 25th anniversary of what was indeed the single worst atrocity over the past 30 years of conflict between these islands and that we have not yet seen an indication of intent on the part of the Government to initiate a full independent inquiry into the events of the tragic day of 17 May. Does the Minister agree that the passage of some 25 years is an unacceptable time for the relatives of those who have died to those who were maimed and injured in those terrible bombings in Dublin and Monaghan?

At this juncture, given the fact that the relatives made the direct request and, as the Minister confirmed and alluded to in terms of a television presentation, there have been other investigations of both events, including the upcoming publication by Mr Don Mullen of an important inquiry into the Bloody Sunday events, one hopes there will be a rekindled impetus. I appeal once more to the Minister that there is unquestionably a major deficit of truth which must be addressed; and this is the appropriate time not to allow the matter to be further delayed.

On the related issue of collusion, does the Minister agree that this Government has a special responsibility to give a lead and to press for an international and independent inquiry into the catalogue of incidents, including the recent murder of solicitor and human rights activist Rosemary Nelson, which points to extensive collusion and co-operation between Loyalist paramilitaries and sections of the British armed forces in the North, including the RUC?

Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Brendan McGahon (*Louth*): Chairman.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The Minister will answer that point before we hear other contributions. I have also taken note that Lord Merlyn-Rees is anxious to contribute on this question.

Mr O'Donoghue: This was an appalling atrocity and I fully agree with the Deputy. It must be remembered that while it may be 25 years on, the Garda file on this matter is still open. As the Deputy is aware, there was a very extensive investigation and following the 1993 television programme the matter was looked at in every respect again. If any further evidence is forthcoming it will obviously be considered in the context of bringing forward a prosecution or prosecutions. It must be emphasised that a tribunal of inquiry cannot achieve what the Garda investigations have not: a successful prosecution or prosecutions. The Gardaí are extremely anxious to bring the perpetrators of this appalling act of savagery to justice.

To answer the second part of the Deputy's question, I am not aware of any evidence to support the allegation that the Dublin and Monaghan bombings were the result of collusion between the Northern Ireland security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries although, like everyone else, I have heard allegations to that effect over the years. We were all appalled by the murder of Rosemary Nelson and I hope that the ongoing investigation into her death will result in the perpetrators of this crime being brought to justice.

Deputy Ó Caoláin will be aware that the view of our Government is that it is absolutely essential that the inquiry announced by the British Government into Rosemary Nelson's murder, under the Chief Constable of Kent and with participation by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, is seen to be fully independent and transparent. That is of fundamental importance.

Lord Merlyn-Rees: I was Secretary of State at the time and had been so for five or six weeks. Of course I know nothing about these allegations that are being made. I think the time will come - I hope when there is an Assembly in Northern Ireland - when investigations will take place into the murders that have been committed on all sides of the community in Northern Ireland-

Senator Shane Ross: Hear, hear.

Lord Merlyn-Rees: -because not to investigate them will sully the life of Northern Ireland for a long time. It will particularly sully the lives of people who do not know where their loved ones are buried, for example. Murdering and killing was not done by only one side of the community. I learned that within two or three days and so I hope an investigation will take place.

As this is question time there is one question that I would like to ask. The Gardaí have made investigations and have found no evidence that will stand up in court. That has been the experience in Northern Ireland as well. Many allegations are made but very little stands up in court. Has an approach been made to the British Government by the Irish Government for assistance in the investigations that are being carried out by the Garda Síochána?

Mr O'Donoghue: Of course the Garda Síochána maintain contact with the British police forces in relation to many matters. While that is an operational matter, I can say that co-operation, where it is necessary and is deemed prudent, is maintained. Obviously, it would not be possible for me to delve into any particular case because these are operational matters where security is concerned.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Exceptionally on this occasion, I will take a short question from Mr Brendan McGahon. We have 18 questions and I am very anxious to accommodate all Members.

Mr Brendan McGahon (Louth): It is ironic that a Sinn Féin representative should call for an inquiry into any bombing. I would have thought Mr Ó Caoláin would have kept silent on that question. However, I agree with the basis of his question and I ask for the inclusion in any investigation of the bombing in Dundalk, which took place at that time. The public perception at the time was that there was an involvement by British forces in the bombing. As a person totally opposed to terrorism, I suspect this is the reason why no public inquiry has been demanded by the Irish Government. On behalf of the relatives, I support an immediate inquiry into the awful bombings which took place 25 years ago.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): If and where possible we should confine ourselves to questions. I have allowed a degree of latitude because we are a body of colleagues and we conduct our business informally. Nevertheless, we cannot allow the introduction of elements which are not the subject of actual questions. However, if the Minister feels he can make a response he is free to do so.

Mr O'Donoghue: I welcome all questions relating to this matter. It is one of tremendous importance. The difficulty remains that a tribunal of inquiry cannot do what the Garda Síochána investigation has failed to do, that is, to bring successful prosecutions. It remains the objective of the Garda Síochána to bring the perpetrators of these appalling crimes to justice. The file remains open and so long as it does, the possibility of prosecution exists. If additional evidence is brought forward it will, in due course, be considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions. The 1993 television programme purported to be definitive and to identify the

culprits yet, when the Garda Síochána embarked on another extensive investigation following the programme, no evidence was found to back up the allegations which would result in a successful prosecution. There, unfortunately, the matter stands but the file - as I have repeatedly stated - remains very much open.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I must apply procedures more rigidly if we are to reach all questions.

Joint North-South Parliamentary Forum

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly) asked the Minister whether he proposes to take steps towards the setting up of a joint Parliamentary Forum, comprising members from the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas and what terms of reference he would envisage for such a body.

Mr O'Donoghue: Paragraph 18 of Strand 2 of the Good Friday Agreement reads as follows:

"The Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas to consider developing a joint parliamentary forum bringing together equal numbers from both institutions for discussion of matters of mutual interest and concern."

As the Minister for Foreign Affairs stated in Dáil Éireann on 10 March, during the debate on the British-Irish Agreement Bill, the Government strongly supports the formation of such a joint parliamentary forum. Indeed it would also support the further development of East-West links, perhaps building on this Body as is envisaged in Strand 3 of the Good Friday Agreement. However, as the Minister indicated, this is very much for the members of the institutions involved to consider, when and in whatever way they see fit. The Government would offer every encouragement and assistance to such consideration. The terms of reference and work programme of a North-South parliamentary forum would be for it to determine. However, I would suggest that a possible function could be the scrutiny, without prejudice to the roles of the Assembly and Oireachtas, of the work of the North-South Ministerial Council and the implementation bodies.

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly): I thank the Minister for his reply to this matter. Could I suggest that the Minister elaborate on the encouragement the Irish Government would give to the formation of such a body. I would put it to the Minister that he should agree that if the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement is going to be such as to incorporate action on matters of mutual concern to the people of this island, it can only be done by including a North/South parliamentary forum involving the representatives of the people of both North and South.

Chairman, could I bemoan the fact that we are sitting at yet another Plenary Session, the 18th Plenary of this Body, without participation of members of the Unionist Party? Could I ask the Minister to agree that the defence that was put forward by the

Unionist Party for their non-participation at this Body under the Anglo Irish Agreement 1985 is now in tatters, given the content of the Good Friday Agreement as quoted by the Minister when he referred to paragraph 18 dealing with the North/South bodies. I would publicly invite the Unionist Party to participate in this Body and also to lend their assistance towards ensuring that there will be a parliamentary forum comprised of members of the Northern Assembly and Dáil Éireann. May I ask the Minister to elaborate on the type of encouragement that he feels the Irish Government might provide, rather than say it is a matter for both Assemblies. He has said his position would be to encourage such a forum: could he elaborate on the type of encouragement that might be forthcoming at Government level?

Mr O'Donoghue: The most obvious form of encouragement which the Government can give is to state that it supports it. Clearly in stating its support, it will do everything possible to facilitate the establishment and effective running of such a forum. It is certainly something which would be most desirable. We referred earlier on to the development of this Body in the context of the Good Friday Agreement and to the fact that a Working Party is looking at the future of the Body. It is quite possible, for example, to envisage the East/West link being developed through this Body. The development of a North/South forum is something which the Governments in both jurisdictions would have to agree to; if that agreement is forthcoming then most certainly the Government will be prepared to facilitate, encourage and provide whatever resources are required to enable to function effectively. It would be my wish that the Unionists would see their way towards participating in this Body as developed by the Working Party in the future. If there is a North/South forum then the Unionists would have to be involved - for the reason that they would have to consent to it in the first instance. There is no question of anybody attempting to impose their wills on anybody else. This is all a matter for agreement. Deputy Flanagan is correct when he says this can only be to the greater advantage of all.

Decommissioning of Arms and Explosives

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) asked the Minister if he will make a statement on the policy of the Irish Government over the question of the decommissioning of arms and explosives by the paramilitary organisations.

Mr O'Donoghue: The issue of decommissioning of illegally-held arms was addressed by all the parties in the negotiations which led to the Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement sets out the result of those negotiations. In the Good Friday Agreement, all the parties recalled their earlier agreement that the resolution of the decommissioning issue is an indispensable part of the process of negotiation. The parties also noted the progress made by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and the two Governments in developing schemes for the achievement of decommissioning of illegally held arms in the possession of paramilitary groups. In the Agreement all the participants re-affirmed their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations and

confirmed their intention to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission and to use any influence they may have to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years of the referendums endorsing it and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement. The Government has stressed the importance of securing the decommissioning of illegally held arms, held by paramilitary organisations in both jurisdictions and it wants to see decommissioning achieved as quickly as possible.

Decommissioning of illegally held arms is an essential part of the Good Friday Agreement and progress in this area will play a vital part in the whole process. The decommissioning scheme and regulations which were put in place by both Governments established the framework for the achievement of decommissioning of illegally-held arms. The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning was established so that those who hold illegal arms could be assured that decommissioning would be carried out independent of both Governments, but in a way that was also verifiable. The Independent Commission has continued to fulfil its central role in the process since it was established and the Government has full confidence in its members in carrying out their difficult task. In line with its mandate to report periodically to both Governments on their activities, the members of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning have regular meetings with Ministers and officials of both Governments. Together with the Minister of State, Mr Adam Ingram, I have met with members of the Commission on three occasions. Most recently, I met with the Commission on 21 January this year. Officials from my Department have met with them on six occasions, including five occasions jointly with British officials. The purpose of these meetings is to enable the Commission to apprise the Governments on progress on the discharge of their mandate. The Commission also holds regular meetings with the parties in Northern Ireland. I understand that members of the Decommissioning Commission including its Chairman, General de Chastelain, met with members of this Body earlier this month. The nomination by Martin McGuinness by Sinn Fein to liaise with the Commission was a significant step, as well as the nominations of Billy Hutchinson by the UVF and Red Hand Commando and Pastor Kenny McGlinton by the LVF. It is clear that decommission is being seen as having an important role to play in the process. These developments are to be welcomed as a sign of progress.

The Taoiseach has addressed the issue of decommissioning on many occasions. He has stated that it is not helpful if parties reiterate entrenched positions and become more defensive in the process. He emphasised that we have all invested a great deal of time on this process and if we are to make progress, we must face up to the reality of difficult issues. There must be a willingness on all sides to live up to the commitments entered into in the Agreement and to press ahead with its implementation. Our meeting here takes place at a time when there is again a major attempt underway involving both Governments at the highest level and all the parties to advance the process is set out in the Good Friday Agreement.

Hopefully, the approaching anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement will act as a spur and increase the determination of all sides to produce a successful outcome.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Kennedy): I note that Harry Barnes has a question down on exactly the same topic. Perhaps it would be appropriate that I should allow Harry Barnes after Peter has put his question, the opportunity to put a supplementary question on this as well.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): I am very grateful. Going back to his main speech, he talked about how essential the breaking of the deadlock was - and, goodness knows, we all agree with him. He also said that it would not be prudent to speculate publicly at this stage about the ways and means of breaking that deadlock. I respect his statement in asking this question. It is not for me to speculate either. Would he agree that it is essential at the end of this week that both sides have to compromise? Neither side can afford to be seen to lose this one. In addition, does he have anything to say to the leadership of both sides on the cost of failure to the island of Ireland in general and Northern Ireland in particular?

Mr Harry Barnes (Derbyshire North East): Gerry Adams has said that the Sinn Féin leadership cannot deliver decommissioning. However, would it not be helpful if on that side it was felt they were striving fiercely for decommissioning, they sincerely wished it to happen and they were pressing and pushing, even after this stage, to see it achieved, rather than merely stating that by May 2000 decommissioning may have become an irrelevancy?

Mr O'Donoghue: Decommissioning was an essential part of the negotiations and an important element of the Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement stands as a whole and all parts of it must be implemented. Resolution of the decommissioning issue is an intrinsic part of the Agreement. The practical aspects of the decommissioning issue are entrusted to the Commission under the able chairmanship of General de Chastelain, who is doing an excellent job. The integrity and independence of the Commission is respected on all sides. The Commission has the full confidence and support of both Governments.

Building trust between all sides is crucial. In this context decommissioning is of considerable importance. Clearly there will again be a real effort this week to try to resolve the current log-jam which to date has prevented the formation of the Executive. Peter Temple-Morris is correct in stating that failure would have serious consequences. When the Honourable Member asked the question about the possibility of failure he was in truth stating that it is something we cannot afford. The Irish people, North and South, have made their positions known. The Governments have made their positions known. Literally, the people have spoken; and it is clearly incumbent on all sides to ensure the will of the people is implemented. The Irish Government will do everything it can to try to build trust on all sides so that matters can progress. I would like to acknowledge the outstanding role played by Mr Temple-Morris, not least in his Chairmanship of this auspicious Body.

Industrial Development in the Border Regions North and South

Mr John Ellis (*Sligo-Leitrim*) asked the Minister if there has been any discussion with regard to the setting up of a special task force for industrial development in the Border regions North and South.

Mr O'Donoghue: Industrial Development in the Border regions is currently benefiting from many industrial and economic development measures of bodies, such as the International Fund for Ireland and the European Union Structural Fund-supported INTERREG programme. The industrial development work of the two Governments and their respective agencies is continuing. In the case of my own Government I can add that attention to regional requirements in relation to programmes of agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland has been intensified in recent times.

The proposed establishment of a North-South body for trade and business development - agreed by the two Governments and part of the recently legislated package of measures to implement the Good Friday Agreement - has particular significance and potential for the development of the Border region, as do the other implementation bodies and the areas for co-operation which have been agreed. The implementation bodies have come about as a result of intensive negotiations involving all sides, including the British and Irish Governments and the parties in Northern Ireland. Together with the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council, they offer us an opportunity to copper-fasten the peace process and redefine the relationships between both sections of our community.

The new working procedures which these bodies will provide will allow us to begin the process of ensuring the economic prosperity of the Border regions which have suffered most as a result of the Troubles. The proposed new trade and business development body will complement the work of existing agencies and in some specific cases it will have functions currently executed by existing enterprise support agencies. The existing enterprise support agencies North and South will continue to be funded by and operated under the direction of their respective administrations. In drawing up and agreeing the functions and activities of the new body, care has been taken to avoid duplication.

The focus of the trade and business development body will be on business development opportunities North and South. Its main functions will include: developing co-operation and business development opportunities North and South; developing new approaches to business development in a cross Border context in areas such as research, training, marketing and quality improvement; supporting business by making recommendations to increase enterprise competitiveness in a North-South context in areas such as skills availability, telecommunications, information technology and electronic commerce; promoting North-South trade and supply chains, including full business linkages and partnerships; promoting under its own brand cross-Border trade events and marketing initiatives, including identification of new areas of trade; promoting market awareness and researching measures to raise the level of trade or remove any artificial impediments to trade; undertaking other specific projects and events in relation to trade promotion when

tasked jointly to do so, including bringing forward proposals for consideration, with the North-South Ministerial Council on specific projects in these areas.

In addition, the body will review the scope, extent and effectiveness of relevant existing activities undertaken by agencies and Departments, North and South, and recommend to the North-South Ministerial Council for consideration and decision areas where cross-Border co-operation would add value, and ways of extending and deepening such co-operation. Specifically the body must bring forward to the NSMC within three months, proposals on the development of a North-South equity investment fund together with proposals on placement and programmes, arrangements for testing services and for implementing standards, development and certification programmes on a North-South basis for consideration and decision by the NSMC.

The body will have a special focus on the area of science and technology. A shared appreciation of the importance to economic development of science, technology, research and innovation already exists. The body will administer a number of programmes in this area with a view to improving competitiveness. It will also examine options for the achievement of greater coherence and deepening of research and development North and South, including drawing on the findings and recommendations emerging from the Foresight initiatives in the UK and Ireland.

The arrangements applying to the bodies provide for the payment of grants from moneys voted by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Dáil Éireann. It is estimated that in its first full year in operation, the trade and business development body will have a budget of £11.5 million and a total staff of 42. In general, with some specific exceptions, costs will be shared on the basis of 30 per cent North and 70 per cent South. The body will be empowered to employ its own staff by means of open recruitment, temporary secondment and the transfer of staff. Pending the formal appointment of the chief executive, the functions of the chief executive will be exercised by a person designated by the Irish and British Governments.

The establishment of this new trade and business development body will be of substantial benefit to business North and South. Provisional trade figures from the first ten months of 1998 show trade continues to grow. The scope for increasing this trade and for co-operation in selling to overseas markets is considerable. In recent years, the business community North and South has provided strong and courageous leadership in pointing to the economic price of conflict and instability and in urging a generous and pragmatic approach to reconciliation.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I suggest to Mr Ellis that, given the very detailed reply, he ask a short supplementary question.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim): I will put a very short supplementary question. A North-South body is proposed and it does not specifically deal with the area which has been most deprived, that is west Ulster and north-west Ireland. Perhaps further consideration could be given to putting in place a specific cross-Border trade

development group - which is what we all intended when it was proposed in Washington to put these bodies in place. There is a need to deal with the economic situation in that area more than in the east of Northern Ireland. There is a need to deal with the economic situation in that area more than in the east of Northern Ireland or the east coast of the Republic.

Mr O'Donoghue: I am sure Deputy Ellis will agree there has been a good response from the European Union and a very good response from the United States. Everybody wants to see an increase in cross-Border trade and in the prosperity of the Border region. Undoubtedly, peace will bring a greater degree of prosperity; but I will bring Deputy Ellis's observations to the attention of the Minister for Finance

Establishment of Northern Ireland Executive

Mr Kevin McNamara (*Kingston upon Hull North*) asked the Minister he will make a statement on the progress being made towards the establishment of a Northern Ireland Executive.

Mr O'Donoghue: The overriding priority of the Government continues to be the earliest implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in all its aspects. We are working closely with the British Government and with the political parties in Northern Ireland to achieve this objective. Considerable progress has already been made in the implementation process and work is continuing. Although formation of the Executive remains the key outstanding issue, considerable progress on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement has been made in recent weeks. On 16 February the Assembly endorsed a final report by the First and Deputy First Ministers on areas for North-South Implementation Bodies, the British-Irish Council and a Civic Forum by 78 votes to 28. It also approved a final determination on Government Departments by 77 votes to 29.

On 8 March the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland signed supplementary agreements providing for the establishment of the North-South Ministerial Council, All-Ireland Implementation Bodies, the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

Legislation enabling the establishment of implementation bodies was subsequently passed by the Oireachtas and Westminster. Despite progress in these areas it has not been possible to resolve the impasse on the formation of the executive and on decommissioning.

As members know, the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister will travel to Belfast this week in a further very intensive effort to advance the implementation of the Agreement, including the decommissioning issue to which we have referred.

On 1 March the Secretary of State circulated draft standing orders, which would allow for the appointment of the Executive. The Secretary of State indicated her intention to proceed with the process at the next meeting of the assembly in the

week starting 29 March, the week during which Good Friday falls. The solution to the current impasse lies in the building of trust on both sides. Both Governments are working on ways in which the necessary confidence can be built on both sides. We are both in agreement that we cannot allow one issue to block progress on the full implementation of the Agreement.

Mr Kevin McNamara (*Kingston upon Hull North*): I welcome the Minister to our Body. It always good to see an Old Boy who has done well. There was also a young lady who did well in the past. I do not want to go over ground that has already been covered, but I want to ask the Minister about the implementation of parts of the Good Friday Agreement within the Republic and, in particular, those matters concerning the establishment of the Commission on Human Rights. Is it the intention of the Republic to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into the domestic legislation of the Republic as has been done in the United Kingdom, since it underpins the Good Friday Agreement in the North? Will the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Republic have power to send for papers and to direct witnesses to appear before him or her?

Mr O'Donoghue: The heads of a Bill establishing a Human Rights Commission in the Republic of Ireland have been circulated to Government Departments and to two Parliamentary Committees, one dealing with justice and equality issues and the other dealing with the 1937 Constitution review. I anticipate we should have observations back from all sides in the not too distant future, whereupon we should be in a position to proceed with the introduction and passage of the legislation to the lead to the establishment of a Human Rights Commission.

On the question of whether the legislation will avail of the opportunity to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into Irish domestic law, it is not envisaged that it will be contemplated by that legislation. However, the issue of the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights is being given active consideration by the Government at present.

With regard to the power the Commissioner will have, it is necessary that he or she would have the investigative powers about which the Honourable Member speaks. In this context, the power to ask for papers would form part of any investigatory powers. If the Human Rights Commission were to have the power to carry out investigations, then it would have a broader remit than many might have predicted. It is difficult for me to be definitive other than to say that it is being given very active consideration. I am awaiting the considerations and observations of the various Departments and bodies to which it has been sent before proceeding further. Suffice to say, it is intended that the legislation will be brought forward at the earliest possible opportunity.

In response to Kevin's warm words of welcome, may I say I am delighted to see him here looking, keeping and doing as well as ever. I acknowledge, in a genuine and sincere way, the outstanding work he did in terms of the future of this country while spokesperson for his party on Northern Ireland.

Drumcree

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (*Kerry North*) asked the Minister if he will outline the recent discussions which have taken place between the Irish and British Governments or between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Office regarding the Garvaghy Road impasse.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (*Cavan-Monaghan*) asked the Minister if he is aware of the potential for further community division in the Drumcree impasse; and what plans the two Governments have to resolve the situation.

Mr O'Donoghue: The Government has remained in close contact with the British Government and representatives of those involved in the Garvaghy Road situation in order to encourage dialogue and an agreed local accommodation. The cruel murder of Rosemary Nelson, the solicitor for the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition on 15 March 1999, has aggravated an already tense and difficult confrontation and made the search for an accommodation all the more difficult. Despite the brutal way in which Rosemary Nelson was slain we must continue to pursue such an accommodation, if at all possible.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State have regularly discussed the situation on the Garvaghy Road and they have both recently reiterated their view that progress could be made only by a process of dialogue and accommodation.

The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister have also both been personally involved in encouraging this process. Apart from ministerial level meetings, the continuing intimidation of the residents of the Garvaghy Road and associated violence, including attacks on the RUC by elements associated with the ongoing Orange protests are regularly discussed between the Irish and British sides but in the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. Such violence only hinders the search for a locally agreed accommodation.

The potential for further community division in the context of the situation in the Garvaghy Road area and in Portadown generally is all too evident as we approach the marching season again. The memory of Rosemary Nelson and her work for the people of the Garvaghy Road area and for people elsewhere in both communities would be best served by intensifying the search for a peaceful way forward in the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement. We should also remember her professional commitment to the rule of law. It is absolutely vital that the rule of law, including the determinations of the Parades Commission, prevail and be seen to prevail on the Garvaghy Road in the months ahead.

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (*Kerry North*): I welcome the Minister's statement and point out to him that the impasse on the Garvaghy Road is potentially explosive, irrespective of whether there is an Assembly. The litany of intimidation of the Nationalist business community and the people living on the Garvaghy Road would horrify the British members of this Body if they knew about it, irrespective of what side they are

on. I appeal to the Minister to intensify his efforts because the community on the Garvaghy Road are feeling increasingly isolated. They have lost faith in all political parties. Since the death of Rosemary Nelson, they have become increasingly demoralised because in her they found someone they could rely on to represent them properly, particularly from a human rights point of view.

I ask the Minister to reemphasise to the Northern Ireland Office and the British Government the importance of seeking a solution to this issue and of appointing someone like George Mitchell to bring both sides together. Perhaps he could also look at the possibility of this Body, or Committee A, meeting the Residents' Coalition and the Orange Order? Will both Governments set up a special group to look at this issue separately, because it will be a flashpoint as we move towards July?

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan): Does the Minister know the number of applications to the Parades Commission for Orange parades, the number allowed and the number of illegal parades? Does he accept that the ongoing intimidation and violence is a more serious issue? He referred to the need for a full inquiry into the death of Rosemary Nelson. Would he also accept the need for a full independent inquiry into the murder of Robert Hamill?

Mr O'Donoghue: As regards Deputy Deenihan's question, it would not be appropriate to have a special group. The Government has in the past raised the issue at Portadown and will continue to do so in the future within the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. It is a matter of great concern and it is raised on an ongoing basis. The Government has continued to emphasise the rule of law and the necessity of reaching an accommodation through local dialogue on numerous occasions.

As regards the number of future parades filed with the Parades Commission, I understand that grows from four parades in March to eight in April, 16 in May and 32 in June. That gives one an idea of the position.

I am aware of the outcome of a court case against an individual which was delivered on 25 March. While I do not wish to comment directly on the legal proceedings, there is widespread concern in the Nationalist community in Portadown, and more widely, about the brutal killing of Robert Hamill and the circumstances surrounding it. I understand the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Andrews, has met directly with the Hamill family about their tragic experience in the wake of Robert's murder. I understand that Rosemary Nelson was working on possible civil action in connection with the role of the RUC officers at the time of Robert Hamill's death, before she too was brutally murdered. It must be clear that all those involved in the brutal murder of Robert Hamill should be brought to justice.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I hope colleagues understand that we must conclude question time because we are already running five or ten minutes late. I thank our founder member and colleague, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy O'Donoghue, for his informative, comprehensive and informal

replies to the questions submitted. I hope colleagues found it useful and helpful. The casualties of comprehensive replies are the questions which were not reached, but written replies will be issued to them. I hope colleagues accept it is not possible to attempt to accommodate them in the circumstances.

We wish the Minister a safe and successful journey to the North. We ask him to convey to his colleagues in both Governments the good wishes and continuing and constant support of this Body as they make this determined effort to crown last year's Agreement with the ultimate success of implementation this year.

The sitting was suspended at 12.10 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 12.30 pm with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair.

5. ROAD AND RAIL LINKS ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Even though we do not have everyone back in the room I think we should recommence now because we are going to be very much constrained for time.

We will now deal with Item 5: Road and Rail Links on the Island of Ireland.. That is Document No. 63. I now call on the Chairman of Committee C, Deputy Séamus Kirk, to formally move the motion and open the debate.

Mr Séamus Kirk (Louth): I formally move:

That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on Economic and Social Affairs [Doc. No. 63] on matters relating to the Road and Rail Links on the Island of Ireland.

As we all know, road and rail links are always important in an economic context. Economic development requires the best and most up to date transport infrastructure possible. Unfortunately, the development of road and rail links is expensive and obviously takes time. Sometimes the urgency of this infrastructural investment is difficult to meet. Our national primary routes are choc-a-bloc at the present time. Inadequate roads lead to long tailbacks and frustrated drivers. Of course, there are peak times every day. Perhaps the efficiency of our road usage needs redefining. By its nature, freight transport has inbuilt time constraints which we need to reassess.

Rail travel is the alternative to road usage. The upgrading of the Dublin-Belfast rail link is welcome and commuters using that link appreciate it very much. With the concentration of population along the east coast, greater utilisation of that link might be appropriate. The reopening of railway stations along the route would, in turn, help to reduce the traffic volumes on the N1 and the N2.

Population settlement trends are naturally influenced by the standards of our road and rail links. Exit and access points along a motorway have a far greater significance

than we sometimes estimate. On the other side of the economic development scale, good road and rail links can mean an economic well being in parts of the country that need an uplift. There are many areas on this island with a poor and inadequate road network or infrastructure, whose economic future is blighted because of their position.

The phrase "rail links are uneconomic" needs an updated analysis. The capacity of our roads to take traffic is not infinite and the consequences for freight and commuter traffic is obvious. The indications are for continuing economic growth with our population growing apace.

While not exclusive, the principal concentration of economic growth is in the Dublin-Belfast corridor. I am glad that one of the target areas under the Good Friday Agreement is transport planning for cross-Border links. The cohesion in strategic planning arising from that will bring major benefits in the medium and longer terms. Both Ministers, Deputy Dempsey and Lord Dubs, have given a broad welcome to our Report on Road and Rail Links on the Island of Ireland. I would like to record our appreciation to both Ministers for that.

Mr Brendan Smith (*Cavan-Monaghan*): As a member of the Committee that drafted the report, I generally welcome the comments of both Ministers. Progress is being made with regard to the development of road and rail links. This week, Aghalane Bridge will reopen, linking the N3 and the A509. The bridge, which has been closed since 1972, is on the Dublin-Cavan-Enniskillen-Donegal national primary route. Recently, in Omagh, the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Deputy Noel Dempsey, and Lord Dubs, jointly launched the transport infrastructure strategy study for the north west region cross-Border group and the central Border area network. I hope that particular strategy study will form the basis for the chapter in the next national development plan. The Minister, Deputy Dempsey, has indicated that in drafting Ireland's next national development plan there will be a chapter which is common to the development plan for Northern Ireland with particular regard to transport and the development of road and rail networks. That co-ordination is particularly important.

One worry I have concerns the fact that emphasis will be placed on the development of routes, particularly to the east of the country, while there is a huge gap in the road network in central Ulster, through Derry, Tyrone, Monaghan, Cavan and further south. If we are to develop trade both North-South and South-North, the central Border area network requires particular attention. In formulating the chapter on transport for the next national development plan, post-2000, I hope both Governments will ensure that it will be derived largely from the strategy study which both Ministers launched recently.

Mr William O'Brien (*Normanton*): I congratulate the Committee for presenting a report on the strategic transport planning and development of cross-Border transport links. They refer, however, to road and rail, while the links with ports and

airports are obviously significant, particularly with the projected increase in the use of airports for travel.

The Committee should give further consideration to coastal shipping around the island. It is a significant factor if we want to move freight and ease the congestion on roads and railways. There is a possibility of moving freight around the island by ship as well as using the inland waterways. Those methods should be incorporated in the strategic transport planning and development of cross-Border transport links. Perhaps when there is a review of the transport provisions for the island, the issue of the coastal shipping could be looked at with a view to helping to ease congestion on the roads and railways while at the same time helping to develop an important and significant part of transport on the island of Ireland.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (*Cavan-Monaghan*): I compliment Deputy Kirk and his Committee on the report. There is a need for an east-west road network in Ireland. If one looks at a map of Ireland, the roads are like the spokes of a wheel heading towards Dublin, including the Dublin-Belfast, Dublin-Derry and Dublin-Enniskillen roads. There is a great need for a major east-west network. The only good east-west road is that from Dublin to Galway. The need for such a road network might have been highlighted in the report because if we are serious about rural development, we must have proper infrastructure, particularly in the Border region. A road from Dundalk to Sligo would be of untold benefit to the people North and South.

As regards the waterways, it is very encouraging to see specific reference in the British-Irish Agreement to the restoration of the Ulster Canal which would join Lough Erne and Lough Neagh. It would be of great benefit to inland waterways, particularly in the Border region.

Mr Dinny McGinley (*Donegal South West*): I commend the Chairman on this report and, indeed, the response from both Governments. Any proposals which will improve communications between North and South and within Northern Ireland are very welcome. In recent years there has been significant improvement in communications between North and South, including both road and rail. As my colleague Deputy Brendan Smith said, the emphasis at the moment seems to be on the eastern axis between Belfast, Dundalk, Dublin and Rosslare.

I would like to refer to another important road, the A5 from Derry and Donegal in the north west to Dublin, which goes through Northern Ireland. I refer in particular to the road between Aughnacloy, Strabane and Derry which carries a huge volume of traffic and on which progress has been very slow. Some improvements have been carried out in recent years but they have been done on a piecemeal basis. I appeal to the Body to ensure that every consideration is given to making this road a priority in the next programme. This road is very important to the north west, particularly Donegal and Derry.

There have been great improvements in the rail link between Dublin and Belfast. The railways, however, are of little or no significance to County Donegal. There are about

three miles of railway only in the entire county at the moment, so it does not come into the reckoning. Again, I compliment the Chairman on the report. Perhaps more consideration will be given to the A5 in the next report.

Mr Seymour Crawford (*Cavan-Monaghan*): I congratulate the Committee on this fine report. I note from the synopsis that the road mentioned by Deputy McGinley was not highlighted but after today's discussions, I hope the main Dublin to Derry road will be uppermost in everyone's mind. This road goes through County Monaghan and is the main artery servicing industry and so on. If we are to have real links with our Northern colleagues in Tyrone, Derry and Donegal, that road must be a priority in the forthcoming tranche of money from the EU or Government. We do not mind where the money comes from as long as work is done.

The transport of our goods out of the country was mentioned by William O'Brien. There is a need for better transport even through the UK. The Larne-Stranraer service provides a major link with our part of the country as does the service to and from Holyhead. These services make it clear how long it takes us to get our goods to the marketplace. The UK is still our largest market through which we have to travel to reach continental Europe. While I know the study deals with the island of Ireland, these links are equally important. The connections we make to motorways in the UK are as important.

I congratulate the group and refer in passing to the Ulster Canal which Dr. O'Hanlon already mentioned. We have an opportunity to finalise the connections between Lough Neagh and the Shannon Estuary. If the Ulster Canal is restored, it will be a major boost to the region. It will connect Lough Neagh to Lough Erne and the River Shannon through the Ballyconnell-Ballinamore Canal and will be a major asset not only from a tourism point of view, but also from a transport one.

Mr Peter Brooke (*Cities of London and Westminster*): I am grateful to Deputy Kirk's Committee for producing this report and join with others in saluting it. I am grateful to William O'Brien, Rory O'Hanlon and Seymour Crawford for bringing in waterways and, without being ruled out of order by the Chair, I would like to do so for a highly personal reason. It is not that I played some role in helping to facilitate the Ballyconnell-Ballinamore Canal or that I was present at its opening, but my highly personal reason goes back two and a half centuries.

My ancestor, Henry Brooke, who lived in County Cavan, did a number of things in his life. He produced a play which was simultaneously banned in Dublin and London, so he was quite clearly of a subversive nature. He was one of the earliest novelists and was the father of Charlotte Brooke, who was one of the first to collect Gaelic poetry and translate it into English. The particular reason I cite him is that he was a great pamphleteer and in 1759 he produced a pamphlet on the importance of waterways within the island of Ireland and the need for their development. Nearly a quarter of a millennium later his spirit would be delighted to find these matters are still being attended to as assiduously as they are.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan): It is always hard to follow Peter's recollections, which I enjoy and welcome. The physical manifestations of progress in cross-Border co-operation is how I would very much view the propositions in the report and those elements which have not been reflected therein and to which other members referred. They are very important avenues not only for individual and community contact, but also for the transport of goods and commerce.

The Dublin-Sligo link to which reference was made has an important role to play. Unquestionably the current points of contact along the southern Border areas on either side are poor and inadequate to meet current needs. That is a particular proposition which needs to be pushed and moved with some aplomb. The N2-A2 to which reference was made is a very important artery linking city of Derry, the entire north west, including Donegal, and the intervening areas as it makes its way to the city of Dublin. The road is totally inadequate to cater for the exceptionally high weight of traffic. All goods and services have to be transported by road.

Within this entire area there is no air transport service and no access to the ports. It is solely dependent on an inferior road network. It is critical, therefore, that the N2-A5 link between the cities of Dublin and Derry and the north-west hinterland is given priority by both Governments. It would be no better an example of the importance of opening up that contact.

There is too great a fixation on what has been referred to in the past as the Belfast-Dublin economic corridor, the corridor of the eastern seaboard. In the context of the Good Friday Agreement it is important that there be equality of opportunity and respect for the needs of communities other than those who can benefit from an eastern seaboard opportunity. In this regard the Dublin-Derry link is not beyond the bounds of possibility, but it depends on whether there is a will.

The idea of an alternative form of transport has been mentioned on different occasions, linking those two very important centres. The rail link between Derry and Dublin would be an important advance. It would be very costly, but one for which a sustainable argument could be presented.

I endorse the comments made by members, especially by my constituency colleagues, regarding the importance, not only in real but symbolic terms, of the decision to proceed with the Ulster canal link that will bring southern Border counties into direct watercourse contact with counties in the North of Ireland and linking up with Lough Neagh. That would be an important development from a tourism and other points of view, not least the considerations, needs and hopes of the indigenous communities along its course.

I welcome the report and congratulate the Committee on its efforts. Go raibh maith agat.

Senator Enda Bonner: I also welcome the report and concur with the sentiments expressed by most of my colleagues in the Border areas. I recall over 37 years ago

when I first travelled from Donegal to Dublin, to boarding school, I was able to use the train from Strabane to Gormanstown. I regret that this railway line was closed. I take issue with some of the comments made by Lord Dubs in his reply to the Committee. The matter should be looked at again.

With regard to the comments made by Deputies Smith and McGinley on the A5, I recall that at one time, when the N2 from Monaghan to Dublin was the roadblock on the way to Dublin, the A5 was a fantastic road. However, the N2 has improved substantially. There may be roadblocks because of the lack of by-passes of some of the towns. The people of the north-west, not only in County Donegal but also in County Derry, deserve better. I find it easier to travel to Dublin after 10 or 11 o'clock at night. If the railway line is not to be reopened substantial investment will be needed on the A5 and from Aughnacloy to Dungannon to link up with the motorway.

Mr Brendan McGahon (Louth): Peter Brooke gave us an interesting insight into his relatives. Is he related to Geoffrey Bearling, the Newmarket trainer, who did me a service on the turf? If so, I thank him and his family.

I agree with all that has been said, especially by what has been said from those representing Border areas. I echo Senator Bonner's comment on the closure of the railway in 1957 to County Donegal, the loveliest part of Ireland. It effectively put the county into the wilderness; it is another Ireland. Despite the past, the reinstatement of a rail link with the county is necessary if it is to fulfil its potential as a tourism destination.

However, I am more concerned with the east coast. The British members have no conception of how bad the Irish roads are. They were so bad in Counties Cavan and Monaghan some years ago as to be a tourism attraction when people travelled to see the size of the potholes. The need for a continuing upgrading of the national primary route between Belfast and Dublin is evident on the southern side. A bridge must be built at Narrow Water Castle, the scene of that awful fatality many years ago, that would link the northern part of County Louth with the southern part of County Down. It would also link the Mourne Mountains with the Cooley Mountains and would create tremendous tourism potential in my area. Our Co-Chairman, David Winnick, would be aware of this from his role as Chairman of a Committee of a previous Body. He visited Carlingford and was made aware of the desirability of building a bridge in the Warrenpoint area which would open a new vista for development on both sides of the Border.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I call on Kevin McNamara to conclude.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North): I thank the Clerks and the different Departments for their help and assistance. I also thank colleagues for their kind words about the work of the Chairman and the rest of the Committee. Modesty prevents from saying how truly those congratulations are deserved by all concerned.

Members have properly concentrated on the interests of their constituencies. However, the report was concerned with road and rail links throughout the island of Ireland and not just the Border counties. Regrettably the replies by the Governments tended to concentrate on immediate matters relating to the North and mainly to the east coast of the island of Ireland. Yet, representations were made and people were aware of the need for proper development on the west coast to match the balance between Belfast and Dublin with something between Derry and Limerick, and perhaps Cork, and linking those cities with adequate road, and, if possible, rail infrastructures. Both Governments had a negative attitude to the question of increased investment in rail, despite the great returns on the Belfast-Dublin link since it has been upgraded, including the use of new rolling stock, leading to the considerable reduction in the travelling time between the two cities.

Colleagues also mentioned various matters relating to the Ulster canal and the inland waterways and their potential. If matters are concluded successfully in Belfast this week, as we hope they will be, our Committee will be more or less out of a job because most of our work has been given to the Northern Ireland Assembly, the new cross-Border Implementation Bodies and to the relationships which will exist between the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government in the Republic. The only thing which has been mentioned which would still be the responsibility of our Committee is coastal trade, because that will still be a relationship between the two Governments. I can assure the Body that, under the distinguished leadership of the Committee Chairman, the Committee would be only too pleased to go around the coastline of these islands. If we can borrow Mr Haughey's yacht, it would make the trip even better.

The other matter which was not covered directly by the Committee's report but which arose in the periphery was the question of airports: whether there was a sufficient market within the island of Ireland to support the number of small regional airports which have sprung up as areas rightly wanted to establish their own independence and show their importance; and whether investment would not be better directed to improving direct communications with those airports which are already in existence rather than spreading some investment thinly on small provincial airports which will at best only break even or may be subject to heavy subsidies. That might be another reason for keeping the Committee intact.

The Committee is grateful for the support it has received from the Body. We are impressed, in particular, by the fact that the Irish Government has taken on board the fact that its new national plan will include a special chapter dealing with these matters in a relationship with the North. One of the principal criticisms of the Committee was the fact that, while the two Governments have good relationships, the Ministers responsible in the various Departments never met when a strategic review was being undertaken either in the North or in the Republic. They might, if they thought about it, inform the other Administration; but there was never any cohesive work to see where the investment was going and how best it might apply across both jurisdictions. That, the Committee hopes, will be overcome as a result of

the decision of the Irish Government and as the new economic strategy for Northern Ireland is gradually implemented.

I commend the motion moved by the Committee Chairman.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you, Mr McNamara. The observation you made that the issue relates to the road and rail links on the island of Ireland is appropriate. I could not but note that all of the contributions came from the Border regions. Understandably, the priority may be there but there are other places further south, such as my constituency, which have an interest in this also. That said, I acknowledge the special priority which is attached to the road and rail links affecting the Border regions.

I had the opportunity of travelling with the Chairman and the members of the Committee on one occasion within the past 12 months to consultations in Belfast and elsewhere, and I found it informative. Mr McNamara's final point about the need for a greater degree of coordination at Government level between Government agencies was clear and obvious to us in the course of that brief visit. I am glad that it is now being addressed in an effective manner, as he suggested. I thank all those who contributed to this debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on Economic and Social Affairs [Doc. No. 63] on matters relating to the Road and Rail Links on the Island of Ireland.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We will resume at 2.30 pm on the motion in relation to international and European Union involvement with the peace process. In addition, only six members, two of whom, Mr Charles Flanagan who proposed the motion and Mr Kevin McNamara who will conclude it, are obvious, have given notice of their intention to contribute to tomorrow's political motion. The only others on my list so far are: Mr Conor Lenihan, Mr Roger Stott, Mr Peter Temple-Morris and Mr John Ellis. I bring that to the attention of members. I would be happy if Members would indicate to the secretariat between now and then their wish to contribute.

The sitting was suspended at 1.05 pm.

The sitting was resumed in public at 2.50 pm with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

6. INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN UNION INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PEACE PROCESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Michael O'Kennedy will return soon and I will be chairing the meeting for the initial period. It is unfortunate that more Members are not present but I hope they will join us later. I propose that we begin our deliberations on item No. 6 - International and European Involvement with the

Peace Process. I call on Michael Colvin, Chairman of Committee B, to move the motion.

Mr Michael Colvin (*Romsey*): I move:

That the Body takes note of the responses of both Governments to the report of the Committee on European and International Affairs [Doc. 64] on matters relating to International and European Union Involvement with the Peace Process.

It is an unenviable task to have to speak first after lunch. I draw the attention of the Body to Document No. 59, the actual report itself, which was well received at the Plenary Session in York and on which we have received comments from both Governments.

We acknowledged in our report that the question of Northern Ireland has been internationalised on a step by step basis and in a number of different ways. It was interesting, in taking evidence during our inquiry, to recognise the fears that had existed in some quarters, particularly within the Unionist/Protestant community, in respect of outside interference in the affairs of Northern Ireland. It now appears that many of those fears have been overcome. The Irish and British Governments agreed with our analysis of the problems and described our report as positive and helpful.

We stressed in the report that the Unionist/Protestant community might take greater advantage of funding opportunities, particularly from the International Fund for Ireland, and this was noted by them but not picked up by either Government. That is a matter we intend to pursue. We also stressed that both Governments should continue to seek international assistance, provided this is offered sensitively and on a cross-community basis.

It is vitally important that the European Union should maintain at least its current level of financial support to Northern Ireland. Any reduction at present, as we stressed in our report, would give all the wrong signals to the peace process and would be most unfortunate. That point has been responded to positively by both Governments and the Irish Government noted that the final 100 million ecu of funding for the EU peace programme has been confirmed as part of the 1999 budget provisions. The Minister of State, Paul Murphy, also highlighted that point in his supplementary memorandum to the Committee. Both Governments have been co-operating closely with a view to ensuring the most generous possible treatment for Northern Ireland and the Border counties in the Agenda 2000 settlement.

The Committee was also pleased that both Governments listed in their responses initiatives from the United States. For example, in June 1998 the Secretary of Commerce, William Daley, headed what he described as the highest level US business delegation ever to visit the region. Congress has approved the Walsh visa scheme which will provide 4,000 visas per year over three years to provide skills training in the United States for youths from Northern Ireland and the Border counties, which is a welcome development.

The British Government in its response noted that US companies currently employ one in five of the industrial workforce and one in ten of the manufacturing workforce in Northern Ireland and that the United States is the biggest source of inward investment for Northern Ireland. That will undoubtedly receive a boost if the peace agreement can be implemented.

The current division of funding between Northern Ireland and the Border counties in the Republic was also addressed in our report. I refer to funding from both the International Fund for Ireland and the European Union. We stated in our report that this should be subject to regular review. We have been informed by both Governments that the EU peace programme is split 80 per cent to 20 per cent between Northern Ireland and the Border counties. The programme was last reviewed in 1997 and may require a further review. The corresponding split in International Fund for Ireland funding is 75 per cent to Northern Ireland and 25 per cent to the Republic. This, which corresponds to the population distribution in the two areas, is written into the agreement which established the International Fund for Ireland.

During its deliberations and in its report, the Committee also covered the possibility of a role for the Council of Europe. A number of Members of the Body who are parliamentary delegates to the Council of Europe realise that many of its activities involve monitoring processes which are directly applicable to the situation in Northern Ireland following the emergence of the Good Friday Agreement. However, we have been left in no doubt by both Governments that the problems of Northern Ireland are seen as a domestic matter and, while they welcome advice from the Council of Europe, they consider that the monitoring process should be exercised by the Governments concerned and not by the Council of Europe from outside.

We also suggested that, in relation to the British-Irish Council, the Governments should take soundings from the Nordic countries about the Nordic Council, which has operated efficiently since 1952. Both Governments stated that they will do so.

Finally, we stressed in our report that it is absolutely essential that the British-Irish Council - the Strand Three organisation - should have an effective and active parliamentary tier. I checked what the Good Friday Agreement stated in respect of the East-West body and although it says a great deal about governmental co-operation, I do not believe the word "parliamentary" is used. While I accept that we will address this matter later in the Plenary Session when we debate the future of the Body, I welcome the fact that the Irish Government stated that it would encourage the establishment of an interparliamentary tier "while recognising that this is essentially a matter for the decision of the parliamentary institutions themselves".

With those thoughts, I commend the response of both Governments to our report and move that the Body takes note thereof.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Austin Currie, as shadow Chairman, will be replying to the debate. Members should please indicate if they wish to speak. I call Peter Temple-Morris.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (*Leominster*): As a member of the Committee, I wish to thank our Chairman for what he has done in terms of getting and keeping us together and also for explaining, so lucidly, what we have been doing.

I wish to deal with one aspect of this matter, bearing in mind that it involves international and European Union involvement with the peace process and is, therefore, economic and political. When we consider the various outside elements that influenced the peace process, the Chairman of our Committee might agree that while Europe's role was important - in terms of the present and the future - America played an outstanding role in developing the Good Friday Agreement last year. I would not wish the debate to end without paying tribute to the Americans.

President Clinton, who has had a chequered career in general in the past number of years, played an extremely important part in the process. His visit to Ireland in November 1995 was outstanding in terms of the political performance he put on in a difficult situation when the first cease-fire was under threat. That cease-fire later failed and it could be argued that his visit gave us more time, of which, sadly, we did not make sufficient use in order to prevent the Canary Wharf bombing. In terms of framing the final draft of the Good Friday Agreement, the President played an outstanding role throughout the previous day and night. United States financial involvement has been unceasing and their investment in both the North and South of the island of Ireland has always been available. The conferences they held with a view to encouraging investment have given a chance for political meetings and political involvement. It is not an accident that Secretary of State Mayhew had his first meeting with Gerry Adams at the first Clinton-organised trade conference. The Americans are important also because they imply acceptance into the international community in a way that both sides in the North can readily understand. It seems to have become an annual event on St. Patrick's Day for Washington to be the focus of the affairs of this island. This is a healthy opportunity to get together. I hope that acceptance has a weight of argument and persuasion this week when I am sure the President and others will be ready to help. Therefore, I salute the American role and trust that it will continue.

Lord Glentoran: Having started from a rather negative point of view, I want to follow Peter Temple-Morris in complimenting and paying my respects to the effective role played by the American President and the American Government. I also compliment General de Chastelain from Canada and others for their role in the process. I believe that international involvement, led by President Clinton, and the triumvirate of Clinton, Blair and the Taoiseach has brought us to where we are today. Let us hope this is the threshold of something very special. I am certain that without that involvement we would not be where we are today. Many people ask me what I think about the interference of the Americans and so forth. I have no doubt that without that interference and assistance we would not be where we are.

Europe has played a smaller role in all of this, but I hope it will play a much bigger role in building the economy of the North. The Republic of Ireland has learnt how to play a role in Europe. It has played this role brilliantly and has had a superb economy for many years, backed by Europe. I am a little concerned so far as the British Government is concerned about the additionality factor which always seems to hit Northern Ireland when it comes to European funding. I think the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland industry have learned how to manage this. When I was looking at European funding, I was always faced with the additionality problem. I hope that the British Government will sort this issue out.

I wish to say "thank you", on behalf of one who lives in Northern Ireland, to our international friends, particularly to President Clinton, the President's Office and the White House, General de Chastelain and others from overseas who helped us get to where we are.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I endorse the remarks of my colleagues in relation to the involvement of President Clinton and representatives of both parties on the Hill who have taken a proactive involvement in Irish and Anglo-Irish affairs over the last number of years. This has made a major contribution to where we are today.

I wish to refer to one or two points in the report, for example, the comment from the Irish Government in relation to US initiatives. As someone who comes from a Border county, Leitrim, I welcome the innovative Congressional initiative of the Walsh visa scheme. This legislation is currently going through both Houses in Washington. When enacted, it will provide 4,000 visas per annum over three years to youths from Northern Ireland and the Border counties. This will provide skills training and work experience for the participants. It is an extraordinarily generous gesture on the part of the United States, which continues to operate very strict immigration quotas, although the Irish have benefited greatly from this policy, as has the UK, as a favoured nation. This initiative, if operated effectively, will give real hope to many young people in the Border counties, North and South. It will allow them to acquire skills which they can then bring back to the island of Ireland and use in the overall interests of their local and national economy.

My second point relates to the International Fund for Ireland and the comment that the current division of funding between Northern Ireland and the Border counties of the Republic, both by the IFI and the EU, should be subject to regular review. I was one of the people on the Committee who contributed to this view. I am somewhat disappointed that the comment from the Irish Government relating to the continuation of these divides does not indicate any great change of mind. What is particularly disturbing from my perspective is that the last sentence of the comment from the Government states that these proportions also correspond roughly with the population distribution in the two areas. I do not wish to argue about this issue today. However, I would suggest that if the only criteria being used is population dispersal, rather than economic need, it makes the argument pretty effectively for those of us on the southern side who suggest that the 80-20 split in favour of Northern Ireland on the EU peace programme and the 75-25 split on the IFI funding

is definitely in need of review. I do not think anyone would argue that, proportionately, those of us on the southern side of the Border have suffered far greater economic and structural deficiencies than our counterparts on the northern side. While I do not wish to sound parochial or exacerbate a divide that already exists, I believe this is a matter to which the Committee and the Body should return. Certainly the last sentence raises questions about the operation of the criteria for the percentages.

Finally, as an indication of how far we have come, not only within this Body but also in the relationship between Britain and Ireland, the last section of the report which refers to the Council of Europe - this is the British Government's observations - reads, "The Government further notes that the Committee recognised that both the British and Irish Governments consider the Northern Ireland peace process to be an internal matter." There was a time when it would have been only one Government which would have referred to Northern Ireland's peace process as an internal matter. This indicates the quantum leap in relations between the two islands and the two Governments in recognising that we have a mutual interest in ensuring that there is peace and prosperity for all the people of the two islands.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): As for the split between both sides of the Border, I am very familiar with the argument, because when I chaired the Committee which Michael Colvin now chairs, that point was often made to us when taking evidence in the Republic.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan): I thank you, Chairman, for your comment on that issue. Those of us who were on the Committee previously did raise the issue of the 80-20 split. It was a major cause for concern and was raised every time we got an opportunity to do so. We will continue to argue on that split.

I pay tribute to the work of President Clinton and his officials for their efforts to bring the Northern situation to where it is today. We would all like to say that it was finalised; and we all hope and pray that that will be the case in the next few days, or at least in the next few weeks and months. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach have played a major role, as have David Trimble and Séamus Mallon. Many others have worked behind the scenes to get us to where we are today. While it would not be wise to name them, they should never be forgotten, because without the foot-soldiers the leaders could not get to where they are. It is important that in anything we do or say we do not isolate the leaders more than they sometimes are because they have to bring their troops along with them. Otherwise, the system will break down.

The EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, the International Fund for Ireland and all such other issues are extremely important, but unless we can finalise and build the trust needed to put the Good Friday Agreement, which is now almost 12 months old, into full operation, then we will have problems. Like many others here I live close to the Border, and we get the feeling that some areas of the Agreement are working well, such as prisoner releases. They are being released as scheduled,

and even those recently convicted of heinous crimes are assured they will be released in 15 to 18 months if the peace stays in place. We hope that the peace will last so that there will be an end to all troubles. However, there has to be some give-and-take in the promises and commitments made on the arms issue if we are to reach the golden position where we can say that the issues the Committee is discussing can eventually bear fruit.

I congratulate the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Deputy Currie, on the work they have done on this Committee in trying to evaluate the peace programme and what it is about. We still have some way to go and I hope and pray we can do it shortly.

Mr Peter Brooke (*Cities of London and Westminster*): I welcome the substance of the responses of the two Governments. What I want to say is a trivial matter, but if one does not occasionally mention them, there is a hazard of quality-control slipping. There was a Chicago politician who once said that he did not mind what the media said about him provided they spelt his name correctly. In the penultimate page of the British Government response, it manages to spell incorrectly the name of one of the two British Commissioners in the EU, despite recent comments made about the Commission throughout the EU. I do not believe this to be a conspiracy in the Chicago mode to diminish the Commissioner concerned, rather straightforward incompetence. I mention it so that Government proof-reading, by whichever Government of whatever colour, can be improved. I was brought up on the saying that, if a clock strikes 13, it not only contradicts itself but also casts doubt on all its other statements.

I echo Senator Mooney's final remarks about internal matters and my observation is personal. I only stayed in this hotel once before, which was 30 years ago in May 1968. The civil rights marches had not taken place but people were already picking up cobblestones in the streets of Paris and throwing them at the gendarmerie. Everything we are discussing has happened since the last time I stayed in this hotel. The flags of both countries have been flying from the turrets of the hotel today. That was a controversial decision by whoever took it - and I am conscious it was such - but I am personally moved that it should be so. It is an index of from where we have come in the past 30 years. In that respect, I echo Senator Mooney's observations.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): We will take on board your comments about proof reading. We have seen the error.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (*Cavan-Monaghan*): I wish to recognise the role played by many people internationally, and both the support for the peace process and the economic support Border counties have received. President Clinton has been a major player over the past four to five years and deserves to be recognised, as does George Mitchell, without whose patience and perseverance there would not have been an agreement. I am glad that a bridge on the national primary road in my constituency between Cavan and Fermanagh, which was blown up in 1973 and has only been replaced in the past year, will be officially opened on Thursday and will be known as

the Senator George Mitchell Peace Bridge. It is a nice tribute to him and will remind people in future of the role he played.

On economics, we in the Border appreciate the support we have received from the European Union, through the INTERREG funding and the Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. It is important we recognise those who contributed to the International Fund for Ireland: the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the European Union. During difficult times for the economies on both sides of the Border, the International Fund for Ireland made a worthwhile contribution to regenerating the economy in Border towns and rural parts on both sides of the Border.

In future I would like to see us examine the 12 Border counties rather than six North and six South, because with peace - I hope there will be a satisfactory resolution of outstanding difficulties this week - there will be an unprecedented opportunity for some years for necessary economic development on both sides of the Border. Given that they are so interlinked and because there are now so many worthwhile groups, including local authority groups with representatives from both sides of the Border, I would like to see us dealing with the 12 Border counties rather than six on the North and six on the South. It might surmount the difficulties expressed by Deputy Crawford and Senator Mooney in terms of distribution of funding.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Does anyone else wish to contribute? If not, I ask the Vice-Chairman, Deputy Currie, to reply.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West): I will try to deal with the main points made. Mr Temple-Morris said that, while the EU influence was important, US involvement was outstanding, and he paid a tribute to President Clinton. Lord Merlyn-Rees and I had an opportunity for a short discussion before lunch and we spoke about outside involvement. I suggested to him that, while history has been unkind to Ireland many times in our past and went against us at certain times, on this occasion it has been in our favour. History was in our favour in terms of President Clinton being the man that he is and being President of the United States at the time and, indeed, Mr Tony Blair being Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and having a substantial majority in the House of Commons, which his predecessor did not have. Lack of a majority in the House of Commons caused difficulties in the past. This time history was kind to us in so far as developments taking place here coincided with the presence in office of Mr Clinton and Mr Blair -- and the opportunity was taken.

Peter spoke about the influence of Irish America. When the history of this period comes to be written the influence of Irish America on the Republican movement in particular will be a matter which will be given considerable importance and, indeed, in any continuing difficulties. After this week the influence of Irish America on the Republican movement will continue to be one of considerable importance.

When I first went into politics in the North, Lord Glentoran's father was Minister of Commerce in Stormont. I was glad to hear him referring to economic and

commercial matters. He also referred to international involvement, particularly of the United States. He had no doubt we would not be where we are today without that involvement. He referred to the additionality problem - which was always a problem in the North, going back to the early days of our membership of the EU. I am glad to note that he appeared to suggest that it is a lesser problem than in the past. I hope he is correct on that; but it is something which requires continual vigilance to ensure that any European money is additional.

Senator Mooney welcomed the Walsh visa scheme and indicated the extent to which people in the United States are looking for any opportunity to be helpful to us. He referred to the International Fund for Ireland and expressed his disappointment on that particular sentence in the Irish Government response. It is one I also noted and he is right. We will return to that matter in Committee B. He said he did not wish to be parochial but, as a good Leitrim man, he made the point anyway.

One of the welcome things about the development of the International Fund is the extent to which Unionists have begun to be involved. There was a time at the beginning when, due to the connection of the International Fund with the Anglo-Irish agreement, Unionists refused to apply for the money that was available. I knew that would not last. It has often been said that Unionists were more loyal to the half-crown than they were to the Crown. I am not passing any judgment on that but I knew the refusal to apply for money would not last and, sure enough, Mr John Taylor gave a lead because he was one of the first Unionists who applied for funds under the International Fund. I wish he would give as good a lead in some other matters.

Deputy Crawford paid tribute to the different leaders who had contributed to the Good Friday Agreement, but asked us to remember the foot-soldiers. This message ought to be taken on board. Remember particularly those in the North, the ordinary members of the constitutional political parties, who stood solidly by the ballot box over many years of bombs and bullets and intimidation. We often forget how difficult it was to be involved in normal constitutional politics over those years. I am referring particularly to the SDLP and also to the Unionist Party and the Alliance Party. We deserve to pay tribute to them.

Mr Peter Brooke referred to the two flags flying from the turrets. That is hugely symbolic and illustrates, as he said, the way things have changed in recent years. Deputy O'Hanlon, like Senator Mooney, did not wish to be parochial either - but managed to welcome the Senator George Mitchell Peace Bridge which is in Cavan, not Monaghan! Without being even more parochial than Rory, I will pass over that without comment.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (*Cavan-Monaghan*): It is all the one constituency.

Mr Austin Currie: He also praised the International Fund for Ireland and suggested that there were now unprecedented opportunities for the twelve Border counties. I agree with him on that. I found it ironic that when discussing the cross-Border bodies in the Dáil recently it was not hailed as a great achievement in the way that it would

have been one or two years ago. It was taken for granted that this had occurred. When one reads the Agreement on those bodies carefully one must be impressed at the opportunities for good and co-operation North and South which those bodies represent. I made the point in the Dáil that the number of Ministers who found it necessary to speak in relation to these bodies emphasised their influence on how widespread it was. I also made the suggestion, which I hope will be taken up by the Government and if not by this by a future Government, that there should be a Minister to co-ordinate cross-Border economic activities. The responsibilities and opportunities are now so great that coordination of responsibilities is needed. I thank the members who have contributed so positively to our report.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I thank the Deputy for replying and Michael for introducing the report in such an interesting way.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on European and International Affairs [Doc. 64] on matters relating to International and European Union Involvement with the Peace Process.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy resumed the Chair.

7. THIRD ANNUAL REPORT

The Co-Chairman, Mr O'Kennedy: I move:

That the Body takes note of the Third Annual Report of the Body.

Lord Blease: I would like to refer to paragraphs 14 and 15 of the report concerning the Steering Committee. I wish to draw attention to the historic nature of this occasion. Mr Temple-Morris and you, Co-Chairman, were present and represented the Body on this occasion in Belgium. This initiative was very well received by the press in Northern Ireland, if that means anything. It was an historic, unique occasion.

I know Glenn Barr, Paddy Harte and others involved who demonstrated a unique approach to matters which are historically binding for the people of Ireland. It would be useful to congratulate the Steering Committee on its courage in promoting and assisting this event which has laid down a marker which will make history.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We are all conscious of the unique initiative taken by our former colleague Paddy Harte and Glenn Barr. I was privileged to attend most of the ceremonies which they launched. They have made an immeasurable contribution to a warm understanding of the inheritance of all the traditions of this island arising from the First World War. It was a matter of pride and satisfaction to be present and I endorse Lord Blease's comments. Their contribution will form the basis of a continuing and positive understanding.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Unfortunately I was not able to be present, but I associate myself with the comments of Lord Blease and Mr O'Kennedy. This was a remarkable gesture and initiative by a former Member of this Body, Paddy Harte, which was taken in the right spirit.

On Saturday a constituent came to my surgery and asked me to find out details regarding his grandfather who died at the Somme in 1916. He wanted to be certain that this was his grandfather. He knew the grave reference number and other details but asked me to write to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission -- which does such a fine job looking after the burial places of those who fell. This demonstrates that, 80 years later, people have not forgotten the terrible slaughter of the holocaust which occurred during the First World War. It is a reminder of the terrible sacrifices made. I am sorry that it was not possible to attend. However, I was there in spirit like the rest of the Members of this Body.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): I was lucky enough to be invited to attend the ceremony as the British Co-Chairman was unable to be present. I was one of the early supporters of Paddy Harte's efforts in this Body to start the bandwagon which led to this outstanding achievement. It is a tribute to him and to this Body which was associated with his early efforts. This was the largest action of the First World War when all the Irish regiments fought together as one, and took Messines. The memorial is quite beautiful, and I recommend that people go to see it. It is a perfectly constructed Gaelic tower. It was an honour to be present.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The Body would wish to convey to Paddy Harte and Glenn Barr its appreciation and admiration for this initiative. I am sure it will be the basis of a better understanding in the future which could not have been contemplated a few months ago.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Third Annual Report of the Body [Doc. No. 61].

8. COMMITTEE A - ORAL REPORT BY CHAIRMAN ON ACTIVITIES

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The next item is an oral report by the Chairman of Committee A, Charles Flanagan, on its activities.

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly): I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the Plenary. It is almost two years since Committee A produced a written report because it is engaged in ongoing developments, particularly issues such as prisoners, decommissioning, policing and parades. I will update the Body on the Committee's recent activities on policing and decommissioning.

Before Christmas, members of the Committee met Chris Patten, the Chairman of the Independent Commission on Policing. The Commission was established under very specific and comprehensive terms of reference set out in the Good Friday

Agreement. It was charged with proposing a new beginning for policing to match the new beginning in politics. It began work in June 1998. Throughout the summer research was commissioned and a number of public and private meetings were held with many groups, particularly the RUC and the Committee on the Administration of Justice in Northern Ireland.

In September the Commission visited Dublin to meet the Irish Government and senior officers of An Garda Síochána. It called for submissions from the public and from interested parties. By autumn 1998 it had received almost 2,000 submissions. These varied in quality but each was read by a member of the Commission. In October and November it began hearing evidence from political parties and held further meetings with groups such as the RUC Widows' Association and the Campaign Against Plastic Baton Rounds. The Commission decided at the outset that it was most important that everyone in Northern Ireland should have an opportunity to talk to it, and embarked on a strenuous round of public meetings designed to cover all areas of Northern Ireland.

Over 30 public meetings were held in November and December. Individual Commissioners also visited RUC sub-divisions, and met women's groups and voluntary organisations. Attendance at the public meetings was usually between 200 to 500, with about 30 people making oral contributions. The meetings lasted between two and three hours. The Commission met about 9,000 people and heard over 1,000 oral submissions. This generated a further 600 written submissions.

The Commission conceded that some of what it heard was carefully orchestrated and organised. However, much was genuine and unorganised. The public meetings were unprecedented and the fact that they took place at all is of great importance. Commissioners have gone to places they would not have entered one year ago. They heard completely opposing points of view expressed in the same room.

The meetings have been emotionally, intellectually and physically draining on the Commissioners. People expressed deep pain and suffering. The Commission insisted on the meetings being chaired by independent facilitators to demonstrate that it was participating in a meeting with local people rather than dominating or controlling the meeting. This was a helpful approach.

The Commission formed the view that it should not be unduly tied to a specific time-frame. Their instinct at all times is to push ahead and unless deflected by a security crisis we can expect a report on the police commission in late summer.

There was a lot of uncertainty in the police and in the community about this issue, which was becoming a surrogate for many other problems in Northern Ireland. A lot of weight would rest on the conclusions of the Commission. There had been signs of new thinking in the wake of the British-Irish Agreement, but it must be said that most people expressed the view that one might have expected from Unionists: that the RUC had been the only thing between the community and anarchy over the past 30 years, and that they could not accept this sacrifice ending in disbandment or

indeed anything which did not recognise the RUC's contribution towards the maintenance of law and order in the North. They saw problems associated with the RUC as being a question of perhaps a few bad apples such as can be found in any police force. They also felt that no risk could be taken in tampering with the police force, especially while paramilitaries continued to exist and were armed. On the other hand, Republicans strongly expressed the exact opposite view: that no-one in the Nationalist community had any faith or could identify remotely with the RUC. Each person had folk and personal memories of RUC abuse over a long period of time.

However, there is a middle view: that there had to be substantial change, beyond just the organisational or cosmetic, if the RUC was to attract Nationalist support. There was an understanding within the police force and on the fringes of the Unionist community that radical changes would be needed if the composition of the force was to be changed. There is, therefore, a significant lobby for evolutionary change, even if it is less vociferous than the two extreme views, if the composition of the force is to be addressed at the same time as "down-sizing" or "right-sizing" the force to effect normal policing. This would also have obvious implications for morale, politics and finance.

The Commission needs to put forward recommendations that will give Northern Ireland the very best police service and in doing so it might provide a middle ground. The Commission assumes that the British Government will have a consultation period of two or three months after the publication of the report for further deliberations, and this would bring us to the end of 1999 at the earliest. The report will also have to address the question of timescale. It is clear from meetings held throughout the North that people have a legitimate expectation for change. There is also a legitimate anxiety about security, so the Commission will not try to tie itself into an absolute time-frame.

There was much confusion about the term "community policing". Most communities felt a need for a safe and crime-free environment. Community policing meant developing a segment of the police service which could build up trust and work with the community so that the police became the focus of that desire. It allowed the community to play a full part with the police in achieving it and, contrary to the opinion of many people, it is a very difficult form of policing and will take a lot of effort. The Commission accepted that moderate Nationalists as well as more extreme elements had great difficulty in identifying with the RUC, and felt that the Drumcree incident of 1993 had a profound impact on that perception. However, it is important to stress that the role of the police is to uphold the rule of law rather than uphold the form of the State.

The Commission must have access to all papers, including the Stalker report and the Stevens report. We will talk to John Stevens and others if they have not already done so. The Commission will also look at emergency powers, criminal justice and rule 21 of the GAA.

Change will depend on leadership. The police will have to be persuaded that this is a question of better policing and not any political engagement or trick. There are very good people and a middle management at sub-division level in the RUC who are willing to respond to this. Again and again the Commission was reminded of the extent to which policing reflected political issues and the report will have to carry a lot more weight because of that. It is important to stress that the report when published will be only the beginning of the debate. It will need the determination and leadership of at least a core of police officers and moderates from right across the community to continue improvement in the security situation.

The second activity the Committee is embarking upon is the question of decommissioning. On 26 February the Committee met the chairman of the International Commission on Decommissioning, General de Chastelain, Brigadier Neman, and members and staff of the Commission. The Commission is in constant contact with all parties in the North except the DUP. The strong feeling is that all of these parties genuinely wish for peace, an end to violence and the decommissioning of weapons. The appointment of senior Sinn Féin figures such as Martin McGuinness as liaison officer to the Commission as well as Billy Hutchinson and Pastor Kenny McClinton had been seen as very important and sending a clear message on the decommissioning issue.

While the Commission was receiving the co-operation of all the parties it could not say it was making actual progress on physical decommissioning. The exception to this had been the small but significant decommissioning event carried out by the LVF in December. This had enabled the Commission to demonstrate its ability to conduct such an event. The televising of it had been useful for public confidence building. It also demonstrated to the paramilitaries that there had been no forensic testing of the weapons before destruction.

The Commission had received no indication from any paramilitary organisation that such a group was on the point of beginning decommissioning but neither had it been given any reason to believe that any paramilitary group would never decommission. It was clear that the Commission could act as honest brokers, especially by facilitating a decommissioning event to ensure that it was seen as voluntary and not an act of surrender. The Commission could also pass on any message from any paramilitary organisation concerning willingness or intention to disarm. Whether any such event or message would suffice to resolve the present difficulty was seen as a political matter and as such outside the remit of the Commission. It is important to note the role and function of the Commission under the Agreement where it is stated:

"that the independent Commission will monitor, review and verify progress on decommissioning of all arms and will report to both Governments at regular intervals. Both Governments will take all the necessary steps to facilitate the decommissioning process coming through the bringing of the relevant scheme into force."

On the same day we met Northern Ireland officials at Stormont House. We met the Minister of State, Mr Paul Murphy, who again gave the Committee a general overview and briefing of the political situation. He recognised that the key issue was the political impasse over decommissioning and the establishment of an Executive. He saw it principally as a matter of trust or lack of trust between the two sides. However, he was very understanding of the distance that both sides have come and of the very real difficulties they face in this final problem. He also recognised Easter as the obvious deadline for the resolution for decommissioning on the executive issue.

Finally, I pay tribute to the Minister of State, Mr Paul Murphy, with whom this Committee has met on a number of occasions and who has at all times been more than interested and helpful in trying to assist the Committee in every way. I am sure members will join me in saying he is doing an excellent job. Perhaps, from time to time he tends to be less engaged in the spotlight than others, but He is doing an excellent job in Northern Ireland.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I thank Charles Flanagan for his very clear analysis of the work of his Committee on these very sensitive issues. I am sure the Body will endorse his commendation of the Minister of State, Mr Paul Murphy, and his efforts and contributions in this area.

With regard to today's agenda, this issue cannot be debated now but I am sure what Mr Flanagan has conveyed to us will form a useful base of information for our debate on the political motion tomorrow morning. He gave a very clear and concise presentation on all the sensitive and important issues in which our Governments are engaged in today and for the next few days.

9. WORKING GROUP ON THE FUTURE OF THE BODY - ORAL REPORT BY CO-CHAIRMEN

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The Working Group on the Future of the Body was touched on this morning by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr O'Donoghue. I would like to give a brief summary of the activities of the Working Group to date and to inform members of its broad conclusions, which is what they are, because there will be no conclusion until this Body as a whole has an opportunity at the next Plenary conference in Cambridge to consider the Working Group's report and to take a clear and formal position at that point.

I would like to make one observation before asking David to make a brief presentation. It has been noted to me, even during my absence from the last session, by the press who attended and by some interested parties from community groups in Britain that, while they did not find the proceedings of the Body riveting in terms of dramatic developments, they noticed that the Body has established an understanding and a foundation of goodwill which our Governments can build on in the confident knowledge that the parliamentary tier, both in the British and Irish Parliaments, will support their efforts to implement peace. The judgment of the

journalists - that perhaps our biggest achievement is the fact that our procedures are almost boring in that there is no unnecessary tension, only common cause and common purpose between the members of the Body - demonstrates that this Body has, and will have, a very crucial role in the future. As elected representatives, we are in a position to continue to play a very effective role in ensuring that the tensions, suspicions and distrust which were so evident in the past no longer exists. If nothing else is achieved, it must be recorded that this Body has established a common purpose, common cause and a normality that sometimes journalists may not find exactly dramatic. I do not think that that is our first priority. As Mr O'Donoghue indicated this morning, the initiative lies with us: we are the people who are best placed to know what our role in the future should be under Strand III of the British-Irish Agreement.

At this point I would like to mention the broad outline of a consensus which is emerging at this stage within the Working Group. Between now and a full discussion at the next Plenary Session in Cambridge we will be in a position to vet progress in full. We have reached three broad conclusions so far. First, the Body should have a role in establishing the parliamentary tier of the British-Irish Council, or whatever may be proposed in that direction. It is reassuring to know that the Governments not only acknowledge this fact, but consider it a matter for our initiative to determine and develop that role. Second, the Body should seek to remain the premier parliamentary dimension of British-Irish relations for the next few years. This could scarcely be challenged by any other element in the development of British-Irish North-South relations. I am sure that a further element will be endorsed by the Group when they consider it fully: that the loss of parity of representation between Westminster and Dublin which is reflected in this Body would be unfortunate. We all appreciate that if there are a plethora of organisations, the natural constraints on parliamentary representatives, particularly in the Dáil and Seanad, in servicing a range of bodies would render ineffective what we are all determined to achieve. Finally, it was agreed that the Body would have a continuing role in the short to medium term, subject to our consideration in this Body - which will eventually emerge at the next meeting in Cambridge - as to how that role should be developed.

The conclusion of the Working Group was that David and I should make a brief factual report at this point and that there should not be a debate at this juncture. However, the opportunity for such a debate will arise at our next meeting in Cambridge. I will ask David to give his summary in accordance with the programme we have agreed.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Like a good lawyer, the fact that Michael was not at the meeting because of other parliamentary business does not alter the fact that he has given a very good report of what we intend to do. As you know, we give only very easy tasks to the two Clerks; we would not dream of giving them complex work to do, so we have asked them to draw up a report for our next meeting of the Steering Committee based to a large extent on the discussions we had when the first meeting of the working party took place.

The minutes indicate a difference of opinion, as there was bound to be, on the part of members of the Body regarding the future. However, we were united on two matters. First, that there should be a parliamentary tier. Whatever happens, whether it be the continuation of this Body or a British-Irish Council, a parliamentary tier is absolutely essential. The bodies which have been established as a result of the Agreement are ministerial bodies. These are bodies such as a British-Irish Council and North-South bodies where Ministers will meet, not backbenchers. Our second conclusion was that the initiative for going about our business in the future should lie with ourselves and not with the two Governments. In fairness, I should say that neither the British nor Irish Governments have indicated they want to take on this task. In so far as we will continue to have a dialogue between parliamentarians as opposed to Ministers, our job and our responsibility - to some extent this was indicated in the Agreement in passing reference to this Body - is to Members of Parliament and Deputies. It is our responsibility to ensure that we continue in one form or another. Whether it would be appropriate to have a British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body representing the two sovereign Parliaments, plus a parliamentary tier to the British-Irish Council, and the duplication and difficulty of getting people involved, must be considered. Because of the Scottish and Welsh elections in Britain, a number of people who attended here regularly have not been able to attend this weekend. Whether duplication would make it extremely difficult for both parliaments to find enough people to attend must be borne in mind.

At our next meeting of the Working Group we must give careful consideration to the position of the two sovereign Parliaments. The devolved bodies are clear and we may recommend an arrangement whereby the two sovereign Parliaments continue to be much involved. It will be unfortunate, in my view, having indicated the dangers of duplication if the two sovereign Parliaments are not represented. Further consideration will have to be given to what we recommend. We hope to have a report for the next meeting. It is extremely important that we do so because by that time the British-Irish Council will be meeting and the North-South bodies should be functioning. I do not believe that we would be doing our job if, at our next meeting in September, we were to inform you we could not produce a full report. That report, which will hopefully come before you, may be the subject of a great deal of controversy but nevertheless we hope to have it to you in six months time.

I was involved during the very early days of this Body from February 1990. So hesitant were we about controversy that we never met in public when dealing with a political motion. That, as Peter and others will remember, was because we did not want our differing views to be aired in the press. We were hesitant, we were taking the initial steps after centuries of disagreement. We did not wish to see an undermining of this Body by a great deal of controversy reported in the press which could have caused us a great deal of difficulty. It was only about three or four years later that we had the self-confidence to come to the conclusion that there was no reason why we should not debate political motions in public. Now we do so in much the same way as in the Dáil or the British Parliament. That is an indication of how careful we had to be in the early years to ensure the continuance of this Body. We now want to ensure that when we make our recommendations they will in one way

or another make sure that parliamentarians of both countries can continue to meet as we do now.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you. You may recall that around the end of November the Clerks sent notification to all Members of the Body that we would be addressing this issue and invited views to be submitted to the Working Group. We have not received an overwhelming response at this point. We would greatly welcome individual viewpoints from Members of the Body at the earliest possible opportunity so that we can take them on board in formulating our working recommendation to the Body in September. I know that this is a matter which could, even now, give rise to a very interesting and animated debate but you will appreciate that this is only a short oral report from us on this point. Following receipt of your submissions and our further consideration of the matter we will then be able to have a full debate in September, always remembering that much of this will depend on the very crucial negotiations being conducted this week. Hopefully, a positive conclusion to those negotiations will put in context our determination of the future role of this Body.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Perhaps, you could clarify your last comment, Chairman. Like all Members, I too received the document to which you referred but because of the comprehensive debate in York and the fact that the contributions of those who spoke was minuted and included in a subsequent report, I was somewhat reluctant to add a further layer of opinion to what had already been discussed. I am a little confused as to what more one could add. I hope, for example, that the Working Group will take account of the contributions made on that day. Listening to what David had to say it appears that many of us had concerns about the issue of parity.

Perhaps you would investigate the possibility of clarifying the thinking of the two Governments on what at the moment seems to be three separate institutions, all of which are to be at ministerial rather than representational level: the British-Irish Council, the Council of the Isles and the North-South bodies. The Council of the Isles will deal with the evolving constituent bodies including the Isle of Man and Channel Islands. Without preempting what our Scottish and Welsh colleagues will do, it seems they will be very anxious that representatives be at ministerial rather than representational level. It seems therefore that the last point about the determination to ensure the future of this Body should be reemphasised. We are, after all, representatives of two sovereign Parliaments, while the other assemblies and constituent bodies will be subservient to the two - more so in the case of the United Kingdom than of the Republic. The case for the continuation of this Body is therefore, in my opinion, inarguable. I do not wish to open a debate on this issue. I am curious to know the thinking on this issue.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Senator Mooney has raised very relevant points. We had a preliminary discussion on this and the views expressed are being taken into account. It would be very inappropriate not to do that. In the light of the evolution of events colleagues should feel free to make further submissions by way of development of relevant themes made by them at the meeting in York.

We anticipated the points raised by Senator Mooney at a meeting of the Steering Committee yesterday evening. The Co-Chairmen, between now and then, will make direct contact with both Governments with a view to clarifying those points. We will do so on the basis of our indicating what we feel this Body believes to be our appropriate role. It will, of course, be done on the basis of recognition of Government responsibility and we will include that in the report to the Body in September.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey): I do not wish to initiate a debate either but as the person who sought the setting up of the Working Group I would like to comment on the matter. At that time Secretary of State Mo Mowlam had made a statement at a Plenary meeting to which she drew our attention to the fact that the precise workings of the British-Irish Council would soon be determined. At that time some of us felt that the British-Irish Council would have a parliamentary component to it but it is quite clear from rereading what was set out in the Good Friday Agreement that it will not; it will be intergovernmental rather than parliamentary. This raises a key question - which we will debate in September - of what the objective of the Body should be. In addition to being a parliamentary component of the activities of the British-Irish Council, and therefore a Body which would hold to account Ministers on that Council and thus have an East-West dimension, it should have a North-South dimension. Both the Strand Two North-South Ministerial Council and the Strand Three British-Irish Council should be accountable to whatever organisation is established. This is only a suggestion. Hitherto we have thought of the Body as an East-West organisation, rather than North-South. We could combine both.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The preliminary points currently being raised are crucial. They will be considered in great detail by us. I take the point that Mr Michael Colvin made that our position on the North-South dimension is a matter for consideration. There may be reservations about the linkage between that North-South dimension and this Body and we can appreciate that. The reservations would not be held here but elsewhere. We must take account of the sensitivities of some of those reservations. That said, the point is relevant. If this is helpful in formulating ideas and suggestions for full discussion we are happy to do it. However I do not want to give the impression at this point that we have firm positions or clear conclusions that can be responded to on this basis.

Mr Conor Lenihan (Dublin South-West): I am curious why we should delay until September on this issue. For example, can we not open discussions with the Unionist parties as a Body or in a Working Group in terms of involving them in a newly-formed or reformed group? It seems academic that Mr Flanagan was calling for participation by the Unionist Party. The Unionist Party is engaged with both Governments and other political parties, including parties which have used violence in the past. We are not in discussion with the Unionist parties as a Working Group about their potential participation in this Body or another similar organisation which would do all the things Michael Colvin talked about regarding accountability of the Agreement, the parliamentary dimension and the North-South and East-West

dimension. We are not discussing anything with the Unionist parties in Northern Ireland.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): As the British Co-Chairman, I wrote to Mr David Trimble telling him that the Working Group was being established on the future of the Body and suggested he send a representative to sit on the Group. I stated in the letter that it would be "much welcomed". I did not receive a response. I was not surprised. It is not a criticism of Mr David Trimble, bearing in mind he has other worries and concerns at present. Clearly he did not feel it would be appropriate to get involved in any way with this Body at this stage. They look upon the Body as a creature of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We did our best, as we have done on previous occasions, to involve them in meetings of this Body. However we cannot force people and drag them here against their will. We will see what happens when we publish our report and recommendations to the Body. If that report is agreed and there are continuing developments arising from the Belfast Agreement, then a new situation will emerge as far as the Unionist Party is concerned.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): On the same point, we have had informal and casual contacts from time to time. We are very conscious - as is everyone here - that we would like Unionist representation here. I had very informal and casual contact with Mr David Trimble when he was in Dublin and I mentioned the general disposition of the Body towards Unionist participation. At this point I do not want to indicate an attitude that might appear to be dismissive of the Body; but the initiative will have to come from us. At this point it is not the top priority of the Unionists and that is perhaps understandable. I assure everyone that we will maintain those informal contacts. We are not preventing contact. Any Member should feel free to have contact to reassure and encourage them in the meantime. However, Members will appreciate this is a sensitive area and we do not want to embarrass, much less compromise, the people we are trying to embrace within this Body.

At this point we should conclude on this item as was intended. Members should be aware that any views they have to submit to us or any informal contacts they make will all be regarded as useful contributions. When we meet again in September we will have a report for Members' full consideration. Hopefully, adoption of that will guarantee the role of this Body in the future will be even more positive than it has been hitherto. I thank Members for their queries and observations.

10. EDUCATION AND INTER-COMMUNITY RELATIONS WITHIN NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr Roger Stott (Wigan): I move:

That the Body takes note of the Report of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Environment [Doc. No. 65] on matters relating to Education and Inter-Community relations within Northern Ireland, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.

Over the years, the Committees of this Body have produced some interesting and useful reports. The report which concerns the education of children on these islands is very significant. Committee D has worked on this inquiry since the early months of 1998, during which time we have made two visits to Belfast, one visit to Dublin and had a working lunch in London. I thank the members of my Committee who have participated in those visits and who have worked extremely hard in preparing this report. I thank the school pupils, principals and teachers who hosted the Committee's visits in Belfast and Dublin. I also thank all the other organisations associated with education with which the Committee met and corresponded. These are listed in Appendices C and D of the report.

The report follows from the work completed by Committee D in 1995 under the chairmanship of Sir Giles Shaw. It focuses on four main themes: integrated education; education for mutual understanding (or EMU); teaching through the medium of the Irish language, which is an interesting development currently taking place; and teacher mobility. Most of the work focused on the education system in Northern Ireland, particularly on integrated education. The report also touches on projects which worked East-West in promoting mutual understanding, such as the Warrington Project, which promotes the incorporation of Irish subjects and materials into the English national curriculum, and the Columba initiative in Scotland, which promotes the use of Scots Gaelic. The Committee is aware that this part of its work has not yet been fully explored and we hope to visit the Columba Project in Scotland and the Warrington Project in June this year.

As the Chairman of this Committee, I want to concentrate on two areas of this report: integrated education and EMU. I hope that other members of the Committee will speak to other aspects of the report. In paragraph 5 of the report, the Committee sets out the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education's definition of an integrated school, one where children of the two traditions in Northern Ireland are educated together to promote the worth and self-esteem of all individuals within the school community. The Committee had most difficulty agreeing the paragraphs of the report on integrated education, particularly those dealing with "new-build" integrated schools, which are started on green field sites.

Since the 1995 report we have found the cost of this sector, which educates only 2 per cent to 3 per cent of the children in Northern Ireland has risen very substantially. That is set out in paragraph 12 of the report.

At the last Plenary Session we discussed our work for the report. Some members of the Body expressed concern at these costs. However, after much deliberation the Committee felt it would not be appropriate to withdraw support for "new-build" integrated education at this point in the peace process; and this decision is reflected in paragraph 14 of the report.

Since 1995 there has been a significant development in integrated education, the development of what are called "transforming integrated schools", which develop from existing schools of a single tradition in existing buildings. The Department of

Education in Northern Ireland, DENI, told the Committee that that transformation had been the original emphasis of the 1989 Education Order, which placed a duty upon the Department to encourage and facilitate integrated education; but that had been left on the sidelines as "new-build" schools developed.

The Committee made an interesting visit to Brownlow College, a transforming secondary school, half way between Portadown and Drumcree. It was here the real problems facing integrated education were brought home to the Committee. The headmaster told the Committee that it was "an act of courage" for the pupils to wear the school uniform outside the school gates and that the school struggled to maintain its Catholic intake to qualify for integrated education status. The Committee felt that the transformation should be seen as a very important way of developing integrated education while reducing the capital cost of starting schools on green field sites.

In paragraphs 27 and 28 we have set out a simple way in which the Department of Education in Northern Ireland could give significant help to schools such as Brownlow by the secondment of teachers and funds for a specialist Catholic vice-principal at the school. This would go a long way towards helping them to achieve full integration.

Brownlow showed the Committee there can be no simple solutions to the question posed by education in Northern Ireland and that any transformation will be a long and difficult process. One aspect that will help to change people's ideas in the short term will be a successful incorporation of the themes of education for mutual understanding into the curriculum and into out of school activities. Paragraph 13 of the report contains some suggestions on EMU.

I would like to draw the attention of the Plenary Session to the way in which very busy teachers in many of the schools the Committee visited spent a good deal of time developing impressive teaching materials and exchange programmes to broaden their pupils' horizons. I would like to praise the teachers for their commitment to EMU in face of great difficulties. One teacher told the Committee that during the periods of violence, schools had first and foremost to provide a secure and stable environment for the children to bolster their self-confidence even before they could begin to learn the principles of understanding each other. Nevertheless, as the only member of the present Committee D who undertook both education inquiries, I am very encouraged by the way in which co-operation between the two traditions is continuing and I hope the peace process will further boost this process.

I note that the British Minister and the Irish Minister met recently in Dublin to agree a prospectus for the furtherance of the co-operation between the two jurisdictions in regard to education. It is vital that we ensure that co-operation is fully developed in this field. We all live together on these islands. In spite of historical differences, we share a historical perspective and we very much hope that the education system as it unfolds will recognise that each tradition on these islands has the parity of esteem it

deserves. I thank my colleagues on the Committee and the Clerks who assisted us so ably in the preparation of this report.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Mr O'Kennedy has had to leave the meeting for a short while. He wanted to delay his departure but could not as he had to attend to an urgent message. He wanted not only to thank Mr Stott but, on behalf of the Body, to express our greetings to him. We are very pleased he has recovered from his recent illness. We know the part he played in British-Irish relations before he was involved in the Body. We are delighted that he is back with us and in good health. I call Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin. Did I pronounce that name correctly?

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan): Not quite.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I will get it right one of these days.

Mr Ó Caoláin: The Co-Chairman is working on it.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I am working on it. That should not be taken to mean I am anti-Irish. I would never admit it in the House of Commons but there are one or two of my British colleagues whose names I do not quite pronounce correctly and I try and get around it, but then we do not use names in the House of Commons.

Mr Ó Caoláin: I concur with the report given by our Chairperson. I would like to be associated with Mr Winnick's remarks on his behalf and on behalf of Mr O'Kennedy about Mr Stott. As a member of the Committee, Mr Roger Stott has led our group throughout the period and has shown a great interest. Despite his setback during the past 12 months, he has steered us through a worthwhile conclusion to this report. I second the adoption of the report by the Plenary.

Integrated education must be viewed in the context of choice. That must be a critical guiding principle when looking at the options in education in the North of Ireland. That is a strong statement of support irrespective of the cost element which has given rise to other views on the future of integrated education. The critical guiding position must be the choice for parents.

Education for mutual understanding has had what I can only describe as a chequered career to date. Some of the reported experiences of teachers and pupils leave a lot to be desired. However, the concept is good and the intent is worthy of our support. What is always required - I refer to the earlier section on integrated education - is the goodwill and good intent of parents, teachers and pupils so that the concept will work. We cannot throw the baby out with the bath water because there are so many areas of concern. I am not exaggerating when I say that some of the reports are harrowing.

As regards teacher mobility, we have indicated a recognition of the progress made in terms of accommodating non-Irish-trained teachers within the teaching sector in the 26 counties. A critical area is the provision of the opportunity for teachers coming

from a different training background fully to avail of Irish language qualifications here over a reasonable period of time.

The important point in paragraph 78 of the report needs to be emphasised. It is an embarrassing situation and an indictment of our intent that teachers with significant experience coming from the North of Ireland to teach in the 26 counties are not recognised by the system here for their years of service and are viewed as being on the starter rung of the salary ladder, pending the completion of the Irish language qualification. That is wrong and unacceptable. Paragraph 78 of the Committee's report states clearly that remuneration for the period leading up to the Irish language qualification being achieved must be based in terms of salary at the same level as the salary of similarly qualified teaching staff in the State.

Mr Stott asked other members of the Committee to reflect more on Irish-medium education. We have given significant consideration to all the elements involved. We have had the opportunity to meet a disparate range of experience within the education sectors in the North and South. I commend the efforts and submission of the gael scoileanna movement on this island.

The difficulties highlighted in relation to the setting and marking of examination papers in the Irish language in the North of Ireland is, as the Committee recommends, to be given high priority. It is important that such an opportunity exists to follow through. It is not enough to set the options of the medium of Irish language education but the follow through, in terms of examination opportunities, must also be brought to a high standard. The setting and marking of papers is a critical part of that.

Paragraph 83 of the report suggests an intergovernmental initiative to look at areas of cross-Border co-operation in education in line with the intent of the Good Friday Agreement. Different areas have been identified for implementation bodies and this is only limited by our imagination, wit and preparedness to explore other areas of co-operation. We recommend that a jointly-funded school for Irish medium secondary education be established in the Border area. This would be a tangible means of bringing the peace dividend to the young people of the region. The specified area is the Monaghan-Armagh area, where there are currently four first level primary education opportunities in place with no follow-through in relation to second level education. This means that the young people going through Irish medium education initially must then readjust to an all-English speaking environment as they proceed to second level.

The Committee recommends that consideration be given to establishing a forum for teachers working in Irish language schools, as there is already co-operation between the various gael scoileanna throughout the island, North and South. We want a forum which will cross borders, create bridges and ensure co-operation between those involved in Irish language education in the North and South. That reflects the position applying in other fields.

I hope Ms Corston will note and convey the appreciation not only of myself but of the Committee and the entire Body at the decision to add the Irish language to the list of those languages recognised as part of the English national curriculum. Commendation is due to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, Mr Blunkett, in this regard. This is seen as an important and positive statement. It is appropriate that I reflect my appreciation and that of the many Irish language speakers, particularly throughout this island, at that development. I join with the Chairperson in commending the report to the full Body.

Ms Jean Corston (*Bristol East*): I was delighted to be given the opportunity to take part in the Committee's work because for most of the period of its deliberations I was a substitute member. I was able on a few occasions to respond after the usual short notice one gets as a substitute to take part.

It is also a rare pleasure to be able to make a speech about education because as the parliamentary private secretary to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, I must accept a vow of Trappist silence on issues relating to education and employment. It is nice to have the opportunity to speak on these issues. It is also nice for us from the Houses of Parliament to be able to talk about EMU and not to argue about the euro. Education for mutual understanding is at the heart of the work we are doing.

I associate myself with the comments made by Mr Roger Stott and Deputy Ó Caoláin with whom I enjoyed working. Some of the visits we undertook while in Dublin, particularly our visit to a school in Deputy McGennis's constituency, made it clear that many of the problems we have in our respective jurisdictions are the same in respect of educating children from areas of acute social deprivation and giving them a sense of self-esteem, self-confidence and identity rather than allowing them to feel hidebound by their economic and social circumstances. In relation to the issues that are addressed in this report and specifically the subject of integrated education, I would like to see a future where the establishment of and demand for integrated education are not heralded by obstacles. That was certainly the case, for example, in the establishment of Lagan College. One now hears people talking about Lagan College wherever one goes, but it did not have a fair wind when it was trying to get going. As has been said, only three per cent of the school population in Northern Ireland attends integrated schools and I understand that the percentage in the Republic is the same. Three per cent of education spending in the Republic is on that sector because the proportion of spending reflects the proportion of children going into such education.

I noticed that in a Northern Ireland Department of Education press release, dated 27 January, concerning a £67 million school building programme as part of the comprehensive spending review, it was announced that just £300,000 - but thank goodness there is any at all - will be spent on what was described as an increasing demand for integrated education in the Castlereagh area of Belfast. Three new classrooms will be provided at Loughview school to accommodate the number of

children whose parents want them to have such an education. We must respond to that and welcome it.

I want to turn to the status of the Irish language and make slightly different points from those raised by Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin. Nobody who has any contact with the island of Ireland can underestimate the importance of the Irish language - not only its constitutional role but also its importance in Ireland's cultural and artistic heritage. I was very impressed with the Gaelscoil we visited, where such dynamism and enthusiasm was demonstrated by the children. It was interesting to note that quite a few of the pupils in that school were children of English professionals who had come to live and work in Dublin, but who had chosen such a school for their children to attend, in much the same way as English-speaking parents in Quebec sometimes choose French-language schools for their children. This is because they feel it is good for their own personal education.

I note that Meanscoil Feirste in the North has moved into its new premises and that there is an agreement to develop sixth form provision. Therefore, we are actually talking about the possibility for some children in Northern Ireland being educated right into the sixth form through the Irish language. We should welcome and encourage that. As Mr Ó Caoláin said, I was very pleased last October to be in Dublin when the British Minister for Education, Mr David Blunkett, met his Irish counterpart, Mr Micheál Martin. Not only was it agreed that Irish should be recognised as part of our National Curriculum, it was also agreed that we would start to investigate and develop links as soon as possible between the National Grid for Learning - which is our Internet for schools - and the Scoilnet. That should do even more in helping to establish education for mutual understanding. However, as has been said previously - and I do not want to repeat the same arguments - it should not be a bar to teachers who want to work in the Republic. I know that Mr Martin is aware of the difficulty.

There was a conflict of evidence between the Ministerial presentation and that of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation. The INTO said that teachers from outside the Republic who wanted to teach, particularly in primary schools, found that it was financially impossible for them to do so because they had to forfeit so much in terms of salary.

On the question of integrated education, it is very difficult for people to move outside what has been their personal, long held experience of education. However, I do not see integrated education as a threat to any one person or institution. It is obviously a part of choice and diversity.

I would like to close with an anecdote, although I know that when people recite such anecdotes they are told it is just anecdotal evidence and not statistical. That might be true but they are real nevertheless. I went to a girls' grammar school in a small town in the south west of England. While the ethos of the school was essentially Christian, we were a religious ragbag in that there were Church of England, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist and Unitarian pupils. For 20 minutes when the school opened in

the morning we would have an assembly where we said a prayer and sang a hymn. The headmistress would give us a talk on some subject that came under the general heading of being and doing good and working hard. Then we would get on with the rest of the day. In the second year, a new girl came to the school from a Catholic family in the North of Ireland. She actually became my best friend all through school. To start with, her parents said she must not be allowed to come into the assembly on any account. That was because she was a Catholic. She dutifully obeyed this instruction for two terms and we were all jealous of her because she was spared the headmistress's homily every day. However, in no time she decided unilaterally that this was ridiculous and she came into the assembly. Being such a good friend of hers at school gave me a lifelong understanding of and respect for Catholicism - as it gave her an understanding of my Church of England background - which I would never have had without that experience.

It is too late if one waits until somebody leaves school at 16 or 18 before inculcating them in education for mutual understanding. I am grateful to have the opportunity to take part in what I consider to be one of the most important things anyone could be involved in for the future of this island.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): We must conclude at 5.30 pm because the shadow Chair has to leave no later than then. Before the shadow Chair winds up, I have six names. It is now nearly 4.50 pm so remarks should be reasonably brief. This report has given rise to a good deal of interest, but colleagues could try to keep their remarks short simply because we must conclude at 5.30 pm after the shadow Chair has wound up the debate.

Lord Blease: I join with you, Chairman, and others in welcoming Roger Stott back and on the excellent way in which he presented his paper today. I warmly congratulate him on the production of this report which is one of the weightiest ones the Body has considered. It not only deals with education but also with the social and political outline of integrated education that operates in Northern Ireland. It must be seen as such. It is a well produced and weighty document.

I have been involved in integrated education and what went under that name. If Austin Currie was here he would understand. Mr Basil Mclvor, a barrister, who was Northern Ireland's Minister for Education in 1974, was the first person to present the idea of integrated education. I was also a governor of the board of St McNisse's College for nine years when the Primate was the chairman of that College. Therefore, I got to understand a fair amount of what integrated education meant to the parents and families in Northern Ireland. The document sums it up in paragraph 62, which states:

"However, as a result of over a year of visits and meetings, we are now somewhat better informed. We see integration as a valuable contribution to parental choice within the Northern Ireland education system and we wholeheartedly support its aims, but it is only part of the answer. We have seen excellent work towards tolerance and mutual understanding carried out in other types of school."

This is not education whereby the segregated school is integrated to the disadvantage of other schools.

I support this draft resolution. I am anxious that we get constructive and positive answers after it is sent to both Governments. I thank the Committee for this report, which is a useful piece of work.

Senator Enda Bonner: I also welcome this comprehensive report and would like to make a few comments on the section dealing with teacher mobility. As someone who represents a Gaeltacht constituency, is a native Irish speaker and was brought up through the medium of Irish, I have no great hang-ups on the Irish language qualification and, indeed, welcome the comments in this regard. I recognise the constitutional and cultural importance of the language, as the Committee has done, and the need to retain quality teaching of Irish in our primary school system, in particular.

Like Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, I recognise there are many well-qualified teachers in the North of Ireland who are not able to teach in the South due to this requirement. Indeed, I have many friends who had to immigrate and be educated in Great Britain due to economic circumstances and who were unable to return to teach here because of this qualification. I was particularly glad to see paragraph 78. Members may have seen a letter in *The Irish Times* in recent weeks from a teacher who has been discriminated against. The teacher has my surname and lives in my county. This issue should be addressed immediately and such teachers should receive equal treatment. She mentioned that she received only 50 per cent of a teacher's salary compared to those with full qualifications.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you for that brief and sharp presentation.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey): I am delighted the Committee has returned to this subject since it looked at it in 1995 when I was on the Committee. I am also delighted the number of pupils in integrated education has doubled since then. May I suggest that at some future date, the Committee look at the subject of teacher training? It is all very well talking about education but unless we get to the subject of teachers and how they are trained in the first instance, we are missing out on something.

Will whoever is winding up comment on standards in schools? When the Committee last looked at this subject, the standards being achieved in Roman Catholic schools were rather higher than in Protestant ones. I wonder if standards will be maintained in integrated schools. Perhaps we could be reassured on that matter.

Paragraph 16 refers to educational exchanges. May I put on the record the appreciation in our Parliament of the recent work done by the British Council in bringing teams of teachers from Israel and Palestine to Northern Ireland to see how a community until now divided can work together? It had a profound affect on those teachers to whom I spoke in the House of Commons on their way back to the Middle

East. There is no doubt such exchanges have an enormous benefit. Perhaps the same type of exchange could be arranged from Northern Ireland to Israel and Palestine to see what they are doing.

May I comment on the importance of history? Roger Stott reminded us that we share a historical perspective. Unfortunately, we share two historical perspectives in segregated schools. As they say, as the twig bends, the tree will grow. In segregated education, I am afraid the twigs have a historically bent view of their history. It is terribly important we have one history only in the island of Ireland and that it is taught in the same way in both schools. It is how we look back on our history that very often determines how we look to the future.

As a boy and a Scot, I went to a Scottish school where the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 comprised an entire chapter and was of enormous significance. When I later went to an English school, it comprised two paragraphs and was regarded as a skirmish maybe won by the Scots, but it was suggested that they cheated in order to do so. History is important.

As regards the Warrington Project, I have got it going in comprehensive schools in my constituency. I remind British Members of Parliament that it is almost impossible to find a comprehensive school without an Irish teacher. The Irish teachers in my constituency have taken to the Warrington Project like ducks to water. There is no doubt the Warrington Project is doing a great deal in educating our youngsters to the problems of the island of Ireland and the historical perspective from which they should view the future.

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (*Kerry North*): It was a great experience being involved in this Committee. I would like to thank Roger, who was an excellent Chairman. Despite the fact he experienced illness during this period, he never lost his enthusiasm and was an inspirational figure throughout. It provided those of us from the South with an insight into how education works in Northern Ireland and afforded us an opportunity to go into places like Twinbrook and other parts of Belfast to which we would not normally have the opportunity to visit. It also helped our understanding of other issues, apart from education. Overall, therefore, it was a very worthwhile exercise. This is an excellent document which will be a very important source for the new Irish organisation that is to be established to look after the Irish language throughout the country as well as to Scots Gaelic.

We are all agreed on the importance of aspirations in education. However, these come back to the issue of budgeting. I am in favour of integrated education. While parents from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds will not strive for this, where there is a demand it is important that it be facilitated. That will put pressure on the education budget for more funding.

In 1991-2 the integrated education programme was £3.8 million. Last year it was £19 million and by 2002 it will be £43 million. It is worth that cost. We must be forceful in advising the authorities to provide these resources. While parents cannot be forced

to send their children to integrated schools, we must seek to ensure that those parents who aspire to integrated education will be facilitated.

There is a major growth in all parts of the country in the Irish language school movement, which is to be welcomed. We were impressed with the enthusiasm for the Irish language in places such as the Falls Road, especially among the adult population. When I complimented a person for learning the language he replied that he would not be learning it if we provided jobs. However, the fact that large numbers were learning the language is something that must be encouraged and supported.

Teachers were concerned that they did not have sufficient materials at their disposal. I hope that, following the report, more materials will be presented to them.

On the question of transforming schools, it became clear that Catholic and Protestant parents do not like to send their children to a school that is being transformed. Nevertheless, it is desirable to encourage this. I understand that, to date, those schools that have transformed to some extent have been Protestant. Catholic parents would like to make a clean break; if they are taking their children out of a Catholic school they would like to send them to an integrated school that did not have a previous existence. In some instances we received feedback that Protestants resented the fact that this process removed the ethos of a school which was converted into a transforming school. While transforming education should be encouraged wherever possible, the integrated model is the easiest from the point of view of educating Catholics and Protestants together.

I thank our secretarial support, which was excellent. We revised the draft report. It was a useful exercise from which we all benefited.

Mr William O'Brien (Normanton): As a member of the Committee, I wish to draw attention to paragraph 38 on page 11 which refers to holiday clubs. In some of the areas where the children and pupils were socially deprived we were advised there was immense value in trying to organise activities for those involved in voluntary work in helping children during the long school holidays. In paragraph 38 we commented on the value of trying to organise summer clubs. It recommends that the Departments of Education in both the North and the South consider giving additional funding to such clubs which work with children in disadvantaged areas. There is merit in this because we saw some communities where children were vulnerable to drugs and other such activities in the long summer holidays.

Mr John Browne (Carlow-Kilkenny): The movement of teachers at second level need not be a practical problem for those trained in Northern Ireland and who do not have qualifications in Irish. A metalwork or mathematics teacher does not necessarily have to know Irish to teach such subjects. However, speaking as a former primary school teacher there is a major problem at primary level. Primary school teachers are responsible for their class all day for the year. To appoint a teacher without a knowledge of Irish would be very unfair to the children. There is a practical

difficulty here, which has nothing to do with standards or suchlike. The children would lose out for the year in question. In view of this, it is not practical at primary level unless a teacher has a knowledge of Irish, because it is not taught merely as a subject at primary level but as part of everyday activity. For example, orders are given and requests are made in Irish and conversations are conducted in Irish - which is at it should be. It is not easier at primary level.

Mr Brendan McGahon (Louth): I congratulate my colleague Jimmy Deenihan for his persistence in promoting the use of the Irish language in the North and for telling me off on a few occasions. I also congratulate Roger Stott for his total commitment to this Committee at a time when he was very ill. I wondered how he got the enthusiasm to attend our meetings throughout his illness.

I am disappointed at the failure of the Ulster people to appreciate the benefits of joint schools. That only three per cent, less than 7,000 people, recognise their value was disillusioning and was verification of the problems which exist in the mainstream of Ulster society. Integrated schooling appears to be an answer. I had a similar experience as a young man to that outlined by Jean Corston. I was the only Catholic who played football with a Protestant school team. It gave me a great tolerance of other religions as I grew up. It was at a time when many members of the Fianna Fáil Party were not allowed to watch a soccer or rugby football match. Now the Co-Chairman takes the first seat in the Dáil bar when Sky television relays matches from Highbury.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Rubbish.

Mr Brendan McGahon: I relate to Jean Corston's remarks. Ignorance of the religions and beliefs of others is the trouble in Northern Ireland and was until the Fianna Fáil Party recognised there was another world. Even though it may take many years to be accepted, the promotion of integrated schooling in the North of Ireland is one of the answers to the tragedy of Ulster. I hope extra incentives will be provided to make that integrated schooling more acceptable to the people in the North.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you, Mr McGahon. I will not refer directly to the comfort of the Dáil Bar on those late nights. You might not be aware that my first job in Government was Minister for Sport in 1970. With that euphemistic title, my total budget was £100,000. The only thing I could do was use my authority to influence certain sporting organisations. As a long-standing member of the GAA, in 1971 I conveyed to Páirc an Chorcaigh that if the GAA did not eliminate the ban, I would make a strong public statement against it. I am glad to say that within months they did just that at the congress in Belfast. Therefore, I have for some time not only been watching soccer matches but promoting them, as well as rugby.

Mr Brendan McGahon: Mr John Ellis said you were a vigilante.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Your sources are not always right, Mr McGahon.

Mr Conor Lenihan (*Dublin South-West*): On behalf of the "Soldiers of Destiny", I reject any implication that Fianna Fáil is the GAA at play or the Catholic Church at prayer in the way it was suggested that the Tory Party was the Church of England at prayer. That is not the case. We have had our own soccer players in our time. I want to knock that one on the head.

Mr William O'Brien is correct about the holiday clubs. That is an important issue. It is the disadvantaged communities on which we must keep an eye in terms of education. It is the disadvantaged communities in the Republic, in Britain and in the North of Ireland which produce crime. Disadvantage is the primary cause of crime of every kind. There will be more crime in the North of Ireland following the collapse of the political divisions which sustained political crime. We would want to keep a close eye on that one because it will cause difficulties in the long-run.

The provision of teaching materials for the Irish language in the North of Ireland is important. The Body needs to signal its support for resourcing those people who wish to be educated through the medium of Irish in the North of Ireland. As a member of the Committee who is not a great Irish speaker, I felt proud to meet people in places like west Belfast who are determined to carry their language with them.

I did not agree with the inclusion of one point in the report, the phrase that at this time the Committee considers it appropriate not to get rid the mandatory requirement that people teaching in the Republic's schools should speak Irish. The mandatory policy of requiring teachers and people working in the Civil Service in the Republic to speak Irish has not encouraged the use of Irish in the Republic of Ireland. Therefore it is singularly inappropriate that we require people from the Unionist/Protestant background to speak Irish to teach in Irish primary schools. If there is a constitutional difficulty, I am in favour of removing it. I do not believe in requiring people to speak Irish in order to teach in Irish schools. I hope we will change that in the long run.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I omitted to call Mr Harry Barnes , who should have been called earlier. Mr Barnes, I beg your pardon.

Mr Harry Barnes (*Derbyshire North East*): I am greatly committed to integrated education but I accept many of the problems associated with it. The problem of cost, which the Committee faced up to, is one of those. The problem of parental choice is not always a matter of bias but is sometimes a matter of sheer logistics in that people live in separate communities and, therefore, it is difficult in most circumstances to establish integrated education.

One area at which I always felt we should look in terms of establishing integrated education is in teacher training colleges. There is a problem because St. Mary's College provides for Catholics and, therefore, the State system tends to be for Protestants, although it is of a non-denominational nature. Genuine cross-

denominational teacher training education tends to occur within the university system.

Given that the report deals with the important role of education for mutual understanding and the fact that the report mentions the role of teacher training colleges and points out the importance of the work which is done there, I wondered whether that work was affected in any way by the fact that the training colleges suffered from not having full integration operating in their areas. If they were fully integrated, it seems to me that they would be in a better position to develop education for mutual understanding.

Mrs Marian McGennis (*Dublin Central*): I will try to respond to the points raised. I thank the Members who commented on and responded to the Committee's paper. At this late stage in the evening, it is an indication that it was considered serious.

Mr Ó Caoláin raised a number of issues which we discussed during our investigations such as choice - an issue which was raised by a number of speakers. The Committee decided at the end of its deliberations that parental choice was a deciding factor of paramount importance, that we would not dictate in the report what was best for pupils, and that it was obvious that parents would decide what was best for their children and they would ultimately dictate the way the educational system would go in the North.

When I first came across EMU, I, like Ms Jean Corston, thought that it related to the single currency and I did not know that it meant education for mutual understanding. That is a good indication of what my membership of this Body and its decision to investigate this issue has done for me and many other Members. I learned a great deal from it.

As Mr Harry Barnes said, there would seem to be a need to evaluate EMU. EMU was referred to constantly by the various groups the Committee met but if one asked the straight question "How is it addressed in the schools?", it was not obvious how it was done. I know that it is cross-curricular, but there seems to be a need for evaluation and some kind of evaluation is taking place.

Teacher mobility was raised by a number of speakers. Mr Ó Caoláin was the first to raise it. The Committee wanted to note the improvements which have taken place and the changes in the educational requirements in the Republic. The Committee did not recommend the abolition of the language qualification but it wants to see support put in place to up-skill those who wish to teach North and South.

Mr Ó Caoláin's fourth point related to education through the medium of Irish. The previous report recognised the existing difficulties. However, the huge improvements in the relationship between the Department of Education and Employment in Northern Ireland and the Gaelscoileanna and the desire to see that type of education flourish was obvious to the Committee.

I thank Ms Corston for her participation in the Committee. As she said, she was an associate but that did not debar her from making a huge contribution. She made a written submission on Report Stage and suggested amendments. She is quite right. It struck me because of my constituency experience that we came across common problems in areas of disadvantage. We should focus on that as a challenge and not as a difficulty. We need to follow up this report to ensure that both educational providers in the North and the Republic address those needs.

There is a perception in the Republic of the existence of a Catholic underclass. Perhaps that perception is more common in the Republic than in the North. I was struck by the commitment of the teachers and the principal of the school in east Belfast. The principal mentioned that his pupils would come in waving the flag and singing "The Sash My Father Wore", for instance, and that one morning he played the British national anthem and the children did not recognise it. He tried to impress upon us the fact that those children had no sense of their tradition or culture. He felt that there was a nurturing of tradition and culture in the Nationalist community and that this was being lost in a number of Unionist/Protestant communities.

The cost of integration is flagged several times in the report. On page 5 paragraph 13 it is stated that "the fires of sectarianism would be stoked by envy", and that point was highlighted on many occasions. Schools, particularly but not exclusively those in disadvantaged areas, that were fighting to make inroads with pupils in order to instil in them the importance of education for mutual understanding, felt that they were losing out in terms of the education budget.

I thank Lord Bleas for his kind words about the report and the manner in which it was presented by Roger Stott. He was correct to comment on integrated education. It was difficult for members of the Committee to agree to state that we had "developed" our view. That is how divisive our deliberations became. After the first visit we made to a school, we could have packed our bags, gone home and stated "this is obviously the way to go". However, by the time we had visited all of the providers over a period of 12 months, it was obvious that this was not the only solution. It was a major step forward for the Committee to agree that it had developed rather than amended its view.

With regard to teacher mobility and the Irish language qualification, we are seeking clarification on the salaries issue. This matter must be addressed by the Irish Minister for Education and Science. It is unacceptable that a person with the relevant qualification would not be paid the correct and appropriate salary.

Michael Colvin inquired about teacher training. We visited the teacher training schools and we met representatives from Stranmillis and St Mary's. It is striking that there is a great deal of co-operation between both providers and a high level of integration within the two colleges. Michael also referred to history and two other members of the Committee referred to the need for a common history syllabus, a matter which is dealt with in paragraph 87 of the report.

With regard to the Warrington Project, we only met with its representatives at a late stage. It must be emphasised that the Project is extremely successful but that it operates on a shoestring. The Project needs the kind of financial support and recognition which will allow it to develop.

Deputy Deenihan inquired about the new Irish board. I hope the new cross-Border board will consider the report and refer to it. Deputy Deenihan became excited when it was suggested that integrated education would not emerge as strongly as he believe it should from our report. I believe he is correct in that regard because those groups we met which were involved in the integrated sector would have felt that we had let them down. They are doing a tremendous job but we were of the opinion that we should highlight the fact that it is merely one option and not the final solution.

With regard to Irish medium education, on one of our visits to a particular school - which offered pre-school and primary education - we discovered that the principal had been literally living out of a suitcase and that she was at her wits' end. However, she displayed the hope, joy and enthusiasm to which I referred earlier. On that occasion when we met the DENI officials we could see the tremendous rapport between them. The teacher was not critical in a negative way, she was merely asking if there was any chance that the school would move to its new building before the September session.

With regard to transformed schools, to which Roger Stott made reference when putting forward our recommendations, if the Department of Education in Northern Ireland is about to take that route, then we have flagged the serious difficulties involved. It will not cost a major amount of money to address those issues. Brownlow College was a case in point. The principal was doing everything in his power to ensure that it worked and we indicated that a British charity which paid for an additional head of staff in order to try to create a religious balance in the school. Transformed schools can work once the requisite small amount of funding is provided. However, they require additional assistance.

Bill O'Brien referred to the holiday clubs. We encountered this in my constituency and in schools we visited in Northern Ireland. For a small amount of money, these clubs ensure that children who are at risk of becoming involved in drug abuse could be given the opportunity to consider what they could make of their lives and be given a holiday at the same time.

Deputy Browne referred to the mobility of teachers. We agreed that the same problem does not exist at second level. The Minister has addressed this issue and reduced the qualification requirement. For my part, I dug my heels in with regard to primary education and I am glad the Committee supported me. At this stage, we are not recommending that the qualification be abolished. However, we state that teachers who wish to work in both communities should be provided with the resources they require to improve their skills.

How do I respond to Deputy McGahon's point? I do not know that it is a failure on the part of the community in Northern Ireland to recognise the importance of integration. The Committee believes that parents have the right of choice in respect of the type of education they want their children to pursue. However, if it takes the integrated route, education must be supported financially.

Deputy Conor Lenihan referred to the holiday clubs and areas of disadvantage, a point to which I referred earlier. With regard to teaching materials, we discovered that, particularly in the gaelscoileanna, teachers were literally photocopying their resources and providing them themselves. Assistance is required in that regard. Deputy Lenihan and I clashed furiously on the need to abolish the Irish qualification, a matter with which I have already dealt several times.

Harry Barnes referred to integrated education and his commitment to it. The Committee began with that commitment; and that was the way we addressed the report initially. However, it became more obvious that there were other issues which needed to be addressed. He was correct about teacher training. We only met the representatives of St. Mary's and Stranmillis during one afternoon but there seemed to be quite a degree of co-operation between them. However, Harry is correct to state that if there were across-the-board co-operation at teacher training level it might be more successful. I do not know if lessons on EMU are working. They operate on a cross-curricular basis but we were not informed whether they form part of the normal school day.

I will conclude by thanking the Chairman of the Committee for his total commitment to this project. As highlighted by the report, he was not absent from any of the visits we made or the sessions in which we took evidence. I thank the staff of the Committee for their tremendous work in pulling our "woolly" ideas together into an excellent report. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the schools, staff, pupils and parents, the respective Ministers in Northern Ireland and the Republic for meeting us, the staff of the Department of Education and Science and DENI.

I welcome the fact that Minister for Education in Northern Ireland, John McFall, expanded the remit of the working group in this area to include initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated and mixed housing. We will not achieve the ideal of integrated education in areas where communities live in separation from each other. I welcome the expansion of the working group's terms of reference. Although this report is important, I do not believe it can be dealt with in isolation. Unless issues such as community housing are also dealt with, we will not make progress in this area.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): On behalf of the Body and both Co-Chairmen, I express our appreciation to this Committee for its total commitment to this issue during the past 12 months.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Report of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Environment [Doc. No. 65] on matters relating to Education and Inter-Community relations within Northern Ireland, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.

The sitting was adjourned at 5.30 pm till tomorrow.

Tuesday 30 March 1999

The sitting was opened in public at 9.05 am in Dromoland Castle, Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co. Clare, with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair.

1. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We had better start although we obviously do not have a full attendance. I would like to think we have a vigorous attendance from those who are here. Rather than delay those who are anxious to contribute or to get away, it is only fair and appropriate we start our business now.

We are dealing this morning with the motion on recent political developments. Before calling on the Chairman of Committee A, Deputy Flanagan, to move the motion, I inform Members that Mr Wilshire submitted the text of an amendment to the Co-Chairman and myself yesterday, and we have agreed to accept the submission of the amendment for the purposes of the debate. That does not go to the substance of the amendment, which is a matter on which Members can express their views in addition to the motion. Mr Wilshire will have the opportunity immediately after the opening remarks of Deputy Flanagan to move the amendment. Members have the text of the amendment in advance.

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly): I move:

That the Body commends the two Governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland for the progress made in implementing the Good Friday Agreement, in particular the further agreements reached on the Government Departments in Northern Ireland and the North/South Implementing Bodies; further supports the four supplementary International Agreements providing for the establishment of the North/South Ministerial Council and Implementation Bodies, the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference which were signed in Dublin Castle on 8 March by both Governments; welcomes the approval expressed in both Parliaments of the British-Irish Agreement and the Supplementary Agreements; reaffirms its faith in the Agreement as the only way towards a new future of peace and cooperation; looks forward to the early transfer of devolved powers to the Assembly in Northern Ireland; and calls on all parties to maintain their commitment and ensure the implementation of all aspects of the Agreement.

It is with pleasure I move the motion. Here in County Clare, in the peace and quiet of this hotel, the echoes and resonances of the history of Ireland and Britain still linger in the air. Dromoland Castle where we sit and which became a hotel in the 1960s is the ancestral home of the O'Brien family, the direct descendants of Brian Boru, who was High King of Ireland in the early years of the 11th century. The O'Brien family played a prominent role in the history of mediaeval Ireland. In the 16th century in the face of colonial expansion by the Tudor Kings of England, the family made a local peace and accepted a title from Henry VIII. In the following century the family joined the Reformed faith and gradually integrated themselves into the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, although at all times they maintained a strong sense of their origins. The 14th Lord Inchiquin still lives less than two miles from his former home. The Co-Chairman, Deputy O'Kennedy, mentioned last night the important link through the famous William Smith O'Brien.

In another time and century, in 1829, Daniel O'Connell, the champion of Catholic emancipation, an outstanding lawyer and parliamentarian in the European liberal tradition, and a vigorous opponent of political violence, was elected to represent County Clare in the Westminster Parliament. Daniel O'Connell made an enormous contribution to the development of the democratic, Parliamentary, non-violent tradition of Irish politics. In more recent times, Eamon de Valera, one of the commanders of the 1916 Easter Rising and a revolutionary, who metamorphosed into an extremely conservative politician and rigid parliamentarian, represented this county in Dáil Éireann for almost 40 years. A former President and Taoiseach, he was the dominant Irish political figure of the 20th century. His granddaughter, Síle de Valera, is currently a TD for Clare and a member of the present Government.

The Irish question was close to the top of the political agenda in British politics in the early years of this century. Political decisions taken on Ireland in the first quarter of the century cast a long shadow on Ireland. In the 1920s partition was seen as a solution to conflicting political and religious ideologies in Ireland; we all think differently now. The challenge we now face is to find an accommodation where the two political traditions can share the same space and begin to construct a shared future. The Good Friday Agreement proposes a new political dispensation for the people of Ireland and of Britain. It outlines a model of governance and approach to politics which is responsive to differing and equally legitimate political aspirations. The Agreement refers to "partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South and between these islands." The Good Friday Agreement was due in no small way to the close level of co-operation which now exists between our two Governments. The Irish and British Governments in the past indulged in unproductive politics of megaphone diplomacy in the past, but since the historic breakthrough of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 which resulted in the establishment of this Body, they have endeavoured to manage the conflict in Northern Ireland in a co-operative rather than a confrontational manner. The value of the politics of co-operation have been well demonstrated in the past 15 years. The close relationships between Albert Reynolds, John Bruton and Bertie Ahern on the Irish side, and John Major and Tony Blair on the British side,

have been extremely beneficial. A similar close relationship also existed in the 1980s between Margaret Thatcher and Garret FitzGerald.

On one level Northern Ireland pales into insignificance when compared to other conflicts in Europe and elsewhere. Yet the intensity of political effort required to bring Northern Ireland to its present condition of qualified peace should impress on us all the enormous task facing the international community in its efforts to stabilise other trouble spots throughout the world. Successive Irish and British Governments, the present Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, and the present Prime Minister, Tony Blair are to be commended for their application and commitment to dealing with the complexities of Northern Ireland politics. They have been ably assisted by excellent Ministerial teams and first-class civil servants. The two Governments have been supported by the extraordinarily level of interest in Ireland shown by President Bill Clinton and the American political establishment. The level of diplomatic skill and fortitude shown by the talks Chairman, Senator George Mitchell and his two colleagues, John de Chastelain and Harri Holkeri, was a wonder to behold. The institutions of the European Union have also been encouraging and supportive at all times.

Decommissioning remains the key issue, and to understand the emotional power of decommissioning, one only has to imagine how we as democrats in Ireland and Westminster would feel if we were told that a small political party with a mere 18 per cent of the vote was to be given two seats in Government within two years of ending a sustained and vicious campaign of bombing, murder and assassination in our towns and cities, while still keeping a private army intact and on the offensive. This would be a non-runner in Dublin and Westminster and would not be taken seriously by anybody. If the decommissioning issue is not overcome, there will be no Executive, and if there is no Executive the Agreement will be at an end. It seems that Mr Trimble has very little, if any, room left to manoeuvre, and sadly there has not been the same level of movement on the other side. The IRA's three statements have ruled out decommissioning. The organisation has refused to state that the war is over for good and there has not even been a hint that Sinn Féin will facilitate a timetable or schedule of decommissioning. This must be condemned. At times of severe stress in the evolving peace process such as now, all involved should be encouraged to redouble their efforts by looking back at what has been accomplished in recent years.

After so many years of violence and being lost in the political wilderness, Northern Ireland is within sight of a promised land - a future free from violence and the threat of violence. The time is now right for the parties within Northern Ireland to abandon what remains of the politics of confrontation, exclusion and domination. Their responsibility is to construct a future for Northern Ireland which all of its people can share. The Agreement also opens up the possibility of a new, dynamic and richer relationship between the people of Ireland and Britain. The diversity of cultures and political traditions within Ireland and Britain is a cause for celebration and not regret. Too much has been accomplished in the last few years to contemplate failure. The dreams and hopes of the vast majority of the Irish and British people are with the

political leaders in Belfast this week. At the most fundamental level of all, success this week will save lives. Failure will increase the risk of more violence and death. We commend the renewed efforts of both Governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland to break through the political logjam which exists. We eagerly anticipate a successful outcome to the current round of intensive talks and I wish everybody well in the days that lie ahead.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We have 15 speakers who have indicated a wish to contribute. If there are others who wish to speak they should inform us as soon as possible. I see no need to impose a time limit. I leave it to speakers' discretion.

Mr David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I move the following Amendment:

line 10, after 'commitment' leave out 'and' insert ', begin the decommissioning of arms and explosives at once, and thus'.

It will probably come as a surprise to those who have heard me over the years to learn that I am not implacably opposed to this motion. I am very supportive of much of what the mover of the motion has said. The reason for what may strike some as a change of heart is simple: I am a realist.

The Agreement was signed, though Members know I opposed it, and it was endorsed, though I campaigned against it. The Agreement has begun to be implemented, and a realist knows, for better or worse, that one can never turn a clock back. We must focus on progress.

My amendment does one thing: it invites the entire Body to be realists as well. The reality is that there will be no further meaningful progress without a credible start to decommissioning. It is utterly unrealistic to expect anything other than that. I realise that there will be some speakers who may be tempted to respond to me with assertions about the detailed wording of the Agreement. It is totally pointless to engage in a sterile debate about the textual niceties of the Agreement. It is the spirit of the Agreement which is crystal clear and it is the spirit of the Agreement that we have to follow.

The spirit of the Agreement requires concessions by both sides. To date almost all of the concessions have been one way. Appealing for yet another one-sided concession is pointless. Trying to find another fudge or trying to impose progress is worse than pointless: it is dangerous.

There are three things wrong with attempting yet another fudge. First, when the problem returns, as it will, it is even harder to overcome. Second, a fudge again signals that we are only doing the easy bits. If that is all we do we devalue the entire Agreement. Third, a fudge will increase opposition to the Agreement. Unionist opposition to the package is growing. Another fudge would make an excellent recruiting sergeant for that opposition.

Far worse than a fudge is an attempt to impose progress. One cannot impose decommissioning. There will be blood on the streets if there is an attempt to do so. The realist in me makes me accept something else which others may find hard to accept: I accept that Sinn Féin-IRA cannot - not will not - deliver at this moment. Similarly, demanding that David Trimble compromise again is asking the impossible. Given the current mood of Unionism he, too, cannot deliver. Seeking to impose an Executive and forcing action on two groups before decommissioning starts will destroy the Agreement. The result is too horrible to contemplate. "Blood on the streets" is the only phrase that comes to mind.

There is only one way forward. I accept that decommissioning must start now before any further joint progress can be made. I also accept, and others may need to accept, that decommissioning will not start now. Thus there is only one realistic choice which offers a pessimistic outlook for the two Governments. Do we stall the Agreement or do we destroy it? If we seek another fudge or seek to impose progress I fear we will destroy the Agreement. That would be an enormous tragedy. As a realist this leaves me with only one option - to keep talking until decommissioning starts, however long that takes.

It is unrealistic to expect further progress without decommissioning. If that is true then this amendment makes that point crystal clear. It seeks to make no other point. If, like me, this Body comprises realists, accepting this amendment would make it clear that all Members, whatever their point of view or whatever they have said in the past, are realists seeking progress. That is what this amendment is about and I urge Members to support it.

Question proposed, That the Amendment be made.

Senator Edward Haughey: We were told to be cautious with our words at this time regarding the Good Friday Agreement. We were told that it is a sensitive time. The one thing which must be spelt out loud and clear to all involved, particularly those with influence, is that history will not readily forgive those who do not use their best endeavours to find accord. The next week is critical for the future of peace. The Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, has said that she does not have a mark II plan. She is stating that she does not have an alternative to the proposed Agreement.

Most people are fed up listening to the phraseology of commissioning and decommissioning. One has to seriously ask whether if the decommissioning issue was settled there would be an alternative obstacle. We have had one year of talking which has almost exclusively revolved around the issue of the mutual surrender of arms. We are told that progress has been made. We all know that it is dangerous for politicians to advance from the political trenches. However, they need not fear if they advance simultaneously into a new political no-man's-land. Our evolution must not exclude doctrinaire politics but rather allow it to find its place in a new political arena. Both sides have to accept that there will be momentary gains and losses. However, surely politicians who collectively advance can only stand on firmer ground

as they are standing among the proactive rather than the inactive or the retroactive - those who do not belong to the process of political evolution.

The negotiators on both sides will have to prepare themselves for generosity and understanding. If they are not so prepared, society will not, nor should not, treat them kindly. We demand of them to construct and not destruct as we have charged them with the duty of reflecting our aspirations.

In recent weeks there has been the outrageous murder of Rosemary Nelson. Within hours of that news the Chief Constable of the RUC, Sir Ronnie Flanagan, announced that he was calling on the assistance of the Chief Constable of Kent and a senior member of the FBI to investigate the murder. The Chief Constable is to be commended for his prompt action. It is actions such as these which will build confidence and give credibility to the results of any investigation. Sir Ronnie Flanagan has stated that he wishes the investigation to be transparent. He is to be praised for this brave, professional approach. No one should prejudge or criticise this action until it is proven otherwise.

The marching season is close and the potential for sectarian violence leaves no option but forward movement now and not later. The negotiators must negotiate. For this reason the Secretary of State is correct to have imposed a deadline on an agreement to form an Executive. We cannot afford a vacuum.

Tony Blair, Bertie Ahern, Bill Clinton and others have spent a considerable amount of time endeavouring to bring about peace. We owe them a lot. The failure of the Agreement would be an affront to them and to all those who worked so hard to represent the views of the people so clearly enunciated in the referendum. When the people have spoken so firmly, I cannot accept that politicians with influence in Northern Ireland would be so irresponsible and cruel as to miss this opportunity and deprive us of our human and democratic rights to live in a society of fairness and opportunity. This is why I am cautiously optimistic.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (*Leominster*): It is a great honour to speak in this debate. It is a speech we will all make and it must be responsible because it is almost a frightening and certainly a glad thought that, by the end of this week, we could have peace on the island of Ireland. It is a staggering thought that we are so near and yet so far. In a sense, there will be little disagreement between those who speak. I can even see agreement between myself and Mr Wilshire in this moment when peace might be delivered. All of us, Mr Wilshire and myself included, hope and pray that matters will work out by Good Friday - which is only four days away.

I will first address the amendment and then decommissioning. One could almost agree with Mr Wilshire's speech. However, I hope the amendment will be withdrawn and, if not, it should be voted down because it puts one side of the argument, the basic Unionist position. Mr Wilshire followed up the moving of the amendment with a speech which could regrettably prove to be true. However, its effect in following and developing the amendment was wholly negative because it accepts failure. Mr

Wilshire accepts, as do I, that Sinn Féin cannot deliver. He said neither could David Trimble. One might be able to accept that as well. He said decommissioning will not start now. One might be able to accept that as well. He then said we only have one choice, which is to stall the Agreement or destroy it. That precludes what our leaders are about during these vital four days in Belfast. It precludes the nudge here and the push there, the cajoling here and the pressuring there. In discussing this, we must trust our leaders. We have two men at the head and others behind them whom I can trust more than perhaps I have trusted any leadership during my somewhat wandering political life. They will be the people who will deliver. The effect of the amendment is to take that chance away from them and from us and to assume failure.

One could almost accept the destruction of the Agreement if it reached that regrettable stage, but its stalling is equally dangerous. By doing so, one begins to go down the same road as the first effort at peace prior to the last British General Election, the cause of whose failure was loss of momentum. If there has been any great difference between the current and past Government apart from the ability to deliver, it is an appreciation of why the first effort at peace failed. It was simply loss of momentum. Looking back on it, it is miraculous that that cease-fire held for some 16 months, bearing in mind the minimal progress made.

Stalling the Agreement weakens all the parties. There are many on both sides who want it to fail. It would put the Sinn Féin leadership especially in an impossible position because elements of the IRA, which at present follow the political leadership, would gradually drift towards the extremes. Stall is equivalent to destruction. We must put our hope, however desperate, in these next four days.

On decommissioning, what is happening now and what happened under the first effort is by way of a cease-fire or cessation of violence. We are still not at the stage of a settlement or a general armistice. An opportunity is being given for the second time to talk and to reach a settlement and we are much further down the road on this occasion. Never in the historical equivalence of what is happening has it been the custom to surrender guns before a settlement is reached. I never forget being in what was then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, at the time when Mugabe's men came in from the bush armed to the teeth with guns and bombs. They were put in a camp but not disarmed and were guarded for the duration of the election campaign by a nervous company of Coldstream Guards. Had that election failed, they would have been released fully armed. That is the equivalent historical setting of what is happening in Northern Ireland and is the way one side there views it.

However, we are further down the road than that by way of the Good Friday Agreement. It provides something in advance in that we have a means of settlement and also an undertaking to decommission. We are now heading towards the Unionist position. When we are dealing with the Agreement with the essential necessity of following it, we follow it both in the letter and the spirit. The IRA follows it to the letter and, as Mr Wilshire said, the Unionists expect the spirit. That is where the difficulty lies. One appreciates both positions. With regard to the Unionists, one

appreciates the need that they have - and deserve to have as the majority in Northern Ireland - for confidence that the violence is over. There are many in the Unionist parties who are reluctant to support the Agreement. Whether we agree with or like David Trimble, he has so far delivered and he must not be allowed to fall. His position is very vulnerable. If he were to fall, there are many worse than he who could take over.

Sinn Féin-IRA is understandably concerned about vetoes and preconditions. I daresay the Republican psyche would say Northern Ireland amounts to one big veto on the development of the island of Ireland. I accept, as does Mr Wilshire, that Sinn Féin is not able at present to deliver the IRA on decommissioning. When I spoke in York - others said the same thing - I said they could start decommissioning by delivering a token number of arms which would lead to a process. Having met a number of people involved, I do not believe that will happen now.

Therefore, both sides must compromise, and this is the essential difference between myself and Mr Wilshire. Neither side must be perceived to lose, so it must be asked where is the compromise. I am sure colleagues, like me, have occasionally smiled at the tormented nature of the suggestions in the media as newspapers desperately trawl for this or that compromise. I would like the amendment to be deliverable and would like the decommissioning now. We would all like that because everything would fall into place, but it is not on.

I advance a couple of suggestions which could be worked around. It was unfair to mention them yesterday when the Minister was here because he must go to the front line and be flexible about it. One thing which could be done whereby no one would be seen to lose would be for the Executive to be formed alongside a formula for a programme of decommissioning within the Good Friday Agreement which would be authenticated by General de Chastelain. In other words, the Executive would precede decommissioning, but the latter would have to follow quickly and the Unionists would have to be confident it would follow. One could simplify that with an under-the-table agreement whereby the Executive would be formed first with the token beginning to decommissioning following quickly. I would prefer to have a formula with the active authentication of General de Chastelain. The companion measures to that, which the Taoiseach and Prime Minister are already pushing to the front, should concentrate on demilitarisation overall, which is the language of Sinn Féin-IRA. An active British withdrawal would make life easier for them.

I disagree with Mr Wilshire that the concessions have all been one way. The Unionists have a wonderful opportunity because they have their Union agreed. For so many years they have been vulnerable, they have been backed to the wall and the Union has been challenged. They are now subject to their own people in Northern Ireland to have that Union agreed. They have got Sinn Féin participating in the administration of a partitioned Province which goes against the grain of the long Republican battle. These are major concessions. The Unionists have got their peace if they want it and if they have the courage to take it. Regarding Republicans, they have already agreed to decommissioning in principle by May 2000. There is

absolutely no way they can then pretend the necessity for decommissioning does not exist. They have given us no sign whatsoever that they can deliver by May 2000, let alone deliver now. They must not ignore what they have agreed to, and the sooner they make a start the better.

Senator Joe Costello: I commend the motion which is an excellent one. I ask David Wilshire to withdraw his amendment on the grounds that its terms are not strictly accurate and that such a statement from this Body at this time is not likely to be helpful either to the two Prime Ministers or the other participants who are at this moment seeking a formula to resolve the impasse on decommissioning.

The guns are silent at the moment; they were silent also in 1994 but the precondition of arms surrender ended that earlier cease-fire. Neither Nationalism nor Unionism can be seen to surrender to the other. Both can move within the letter and spirit of the British-Irish Agreement, which has an implementation span of two years. I believe both will have to move together this weekend. We must remember also how precarious the situation still is. The British-Irish Agreement is one year old this coming Good Friday and its enemies have grown significantly in the last 12 months. Ironically, two of the worst atrocities, the Omagh bombing and the Rosemary Nelson murder, occurred during this time. One atrocity was committed on the Nationalist side by those who seek to wreck the Agreement and the other was committed on the Loyalist side by people of similar disposition. Failure to make progress this week will only strengthen both their hands. However, the response to each atrocity has been somewhat disproportionate. Both sovereign Governments rushed through draconian measures in their respective parliaments to crush the perpetrators of the Omagh bombing. The same swift rigorous response has not been evident in the Rosemary Nelson killing. Keen disappointment was expressed at her funeral that while the President of the Irish Republic and Minister for Foreign Affairs were present, no one of that stature represented the United Kingdom or the Assembly in Northern Ireland. Likewise, official representation from the legal professions was conspicuous by its absence. The rule of law is precious, particularly so in the context of Northern Ireland, and every effort should have been made to ensure the legal profession stood shoulder to shoulder with a professional practitioner against the forces of anarchy. In the same vein, the inquiry into Rosemary Nelson's murder requires an approach that will ensure the outcome is a credible one and that her family and community do not feel short-changed or treated as lesser citizens.

In conclusion, I support the motion and the British-Irish Agreement in its totality and I look forward to considerable progress this week.

Lord Glentoran: As a very inexperienced politician, this is the most delicate and difficult debate at which I have had the privilege of speaking. I support the motion. I have supported and argued for the British-Irish Agreement since before the referenda. However, I have a lot of sympathy with David Wiltshire's amendment. I wish it were not necessary and I am not sure whether it is helpful at this stage. I am sure that the 70 per cent Unionist population are very divided on where they think

they are going at this stage. David Trimble does not have the Unionist support he had immediately following the referendum and I do not believe he has anything else to give at this stage. I am certain he must be kept in power one way or another.

The Northern Irish situation has required immense skill and patience by senior politicians for many years; this patience will be required more than ever now. Following what Mr Temple-Morris has said, we must not allow the Agreement to fall. It might seem attractive to stall the Agreement, keep the parties round the table talking and perhaps in due course, as May 2000 approaches, we will get a glimmer of light from the IRA on decommissioning, or perhaps not. This is a pretty horrible thought because, as we all know, vacuums create their own problems and rapidly generate bigger and bigger problems

I have no suggestion as to how the Executive can be set up on Friday, but I sincerely hope it is. However, it must not be a fudge, because if it is, the Unionist population will see through it immediately and it will cause all sorts of horrendous problems. In addition, if power-sharing begins and the Executive is set up and fully empowered, the problem of the future of the RUC, Drumcree, the marching season and several other difficulties will have to be addressed. I envisage another period of serious debate and negotiation. I pray that the IRA will come back to its leadership - if indeed it has left them - and that that leadership will indicate some means of helping to solve the problem. I believe they have received more from the British-Irish Agreement than has the Unionist Party and the Unionist population. I agree with Peter Temple-Morris that the Unionist population have had their sovereignty underwritten and underlined. However, they all do not see it in that way because reality in the North of Ireland among the Unionist population is a serious amount of cynicism, and we must be aware of this fact. Let us hope there will be a miraculous solution.

The Committee reporting on integrated education was a great achievement. This is probably the most important single thing that could happen to change the whole aspect of Northern Ireland in the long term. I commend it to this Body and all politicians involved in the process in Belfast. The marching season is drawing near and we will soon have the Patten Report before us. Unionists are awaiting the change in the Irish Constitution which, if it takes place, will have some impact on this. I believe a deadline exists within which that is to take place.

I strongly support the motion and what Deputy Charles Flanagan had to say in promoting it, and wish those working in Belfast every good fortune.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Like all my colleagues, I do not have any easy answers. Indeed reports from Belfast, while not pessimistic, are equivocal at best. The sovereign leaders, in tandem with the political leaders in the North, remain deadlocked on the major outstanding issue which separates all parties. There is very little we can do apart from offering encouragement and support.

We are all coloured and influenced by our environment, our attitudes and life's experience. Coming from a Border county, I am acutely aware of the sensitivities involved because of the breakdown of trust between two communities a few miles away. Consequently, it has always been practice for me and many of my political colleagues from Border counties to think before we speak publicly. There was a time - I hope it is over now - when words could actually kill. Before agreement was reached between all the parties in the Good Friday Agreement, the South was looked upon with a certain degree of resentment by many in the Unionist community. I think that also has passed.

I always like to accentuate the positive. During informal conversations with my honourable and esteemed colleague, Lord Merlyn-Rees, we reminded each other of how far the political process in Northern Ireland has come since his time as Secretary of State. It is not all that long ago that agreement on a power-sharing Executive was anathema to the Unionists. That was the major stumbling block. It is not all that long ago that the concept of North-South bodies was totally unacceptable to the Unionist community or that any input by the Irish Government into Northern Ireland was seen as a betrayal by the British. We have come a long way. All of those things have now happened.

There was an air of acceptance around Leinster House that all these things would happen when the British Irish Agreement Bill was passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas. But, as the presence of Lord Merlyn-Rees reminds us, he had to sit for long hours to evolve the current political deadlock and had little success relative to what has happened in relation to the Good Friday Agreement.

It is incredible that the Unionists are refusing to form the Executive with elected representatives of the communities in Northern Ireland and are teetering on the brink of collapsing an Agreement which has widespread support across both communities in Northern Ireland and in the Republic. I do not in any way wish to diminish the importance of decommissioning. Perhaps my upbringing and the environment in which I grew up has influenced how I look at conflict resolution in other parts of the world. I am particularly reminded about what happened in South Africa, where no guns were handed over, where divisions deeper than deep existed because of racist and supremacist attitudes. Ironically, when the arms amnesty took place a friend of mine working in South Africa at the time reported that one rusty old unusable gun is all that was handed over when the amnesty was declared. Yet South African society is evolving, hopefully, into a bright new era.

Many other examples have been given by our Unionist colleagues. Indeed, members of the Dáil and Seanad will be familiar with a document recently circulated by Mr Ken Maginnis, MP for Fermanagh, putting forward his view in relation to decommissioning. The reality for me and many others is that the guns have been silent. There has been no indication whatsoever that the IRA wish to return to a cycle of violence.

This motion speaks about implementing the Good Friday Agreement and all its aspects. If that were so and if it had been put into effect there would now be an Executive in place. That is a reality that is not clarified or emphasised amidst the talk about decommissioning. Throughout this difficult period of attempting to reach a peaceful solution people are being killed in Northern Ireland because of they come from a particular side of the community. Ms Rosemary Nelson was killed because she was a Catholic; Robert Hamill was kicked to death because he was a Catholic; people in their homes have been shot because they are Catholics.

I lived in London for a long time and have a warmth and affection for England which transcends all that has happened in the history of our two peoples. I have often reflected that if what has been going on in Northern Ireland since the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and if all the instances I have referred to had taken place, if the pain and unacceptable face of suprematism exemplified by Drumcree was taking place in any part of England, Scotland or Wales, if people, because of their religion, were being shot on the streets, I wonder for how long the political Establishment would accept that *status quo*. They would not accept it, nor would the people whom many of our guests represent. There would be an outcry and they would be given short shrift. Somehow because it is happening in Northern Ireland, it is different. Then again, Northern Ireland has always been treated differently. If there is a tinge of frustration in my voice it is not in any way to suggest that the motives of all those working in Belfast over the last couple of days are to be impugned in any way. They are all good, decent, honourable people attempting in their own way to arrive at an acceptable solution. I dearly wish they would get off the hook of decommissioning and get on with implementing all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement and set up an Executive. Lord Glentoran and many Unionists are saying that an uneasiness exists. That has always been present in the Unionist community whenever political progress has been suggested.

I would like to finish by referring to a comment made about 12 months ago by an SDLP delegation which made a submission to a House Committee of which I am a Member. They said that whenever they were having discussions with their Unionist colleagues and the question of political progress was raised, the SDLP always asked the question "what are you losing, Unionist friends? All we are looking for is equality and parity." Both could then work together within the community and shape the community to ensure jobs, housing, prosperity and economic development for the people. That is what all of us in politics are about.

The issue of decommissioning will never go away but I pray for it to be put in its proper context, the Agreement to be implemented and the Executive to get up and running. Hopefully, we can take it from there. As Lord Glentoran and many others have said, there are serious deep issues within Northern Ireland that have not been addressed by this motion and that have not been addressed over the past three to six months. Drumcree and police reform are among them but those debates are for another day. All I can do is echo and re-echo the hope and wish that if there is a God in Heaven or whatever people believe in, we will have agreement on this difficult issue before long.

Mr Roger Stott (Wigan): I am grateful to be able to comment briefly in this very important debate. I support the motion tabled on behalf of the Steering Committee. I hope, for the same reasons enunciated by Peter Temple-Morris, that David Wilshire will seek to withdraw his amendment at the conclusion of this debate. Those of us from Britain who have been involved in the events of Northern Ireland over the troubled period of almost 30 years could have been forgiven if in our deepest days of despair we felt a solution to the problem was not possible and walked away from it. However we did not do that. We stayed with it and gradually the political process produced people who were not prepared to accept that proposition. They were determined to drive the peace process forward and try to find a solution even if it meant taking considerable political risks to walk the extra mile. We all know the main players in this process and this Body has rightly paid tribute to their unremitting efforts in trying to find a solution to this deeply complex and long term problem.

One of my most abiding memories while playing my small part in this process was campaigning for a "Yes" vote during the referendum in Derry. Nothing gave me greater satisfaction than seeing the people of the island of Ireland overwhelmingly voting "Yes" in the referendums for the peace process and subsequently for the Assembly elections. Even though, as was pointed out earlier, the guns have been silent for a considerable period, great difficulties lie ahead. Difficulty lies ahead this week for those involved in the current discussions in Belfast.

I agree with Peter Temple-Morris's analysis on decommissioning and there is no need for me to repeat it. All of us know the people of these islands are yearning for the politicians in Belfast to succeed. We all have a moral and political duty to ensure they succeed. Failure is too horrendous. We have a moral duty to ensure that future generations on this island do not grow up in an atmosphere of sectarian gratuitous violence. We have a moral and political responsibility to ensure that we recognise that the people on this island have demonstrated - not only through the referendum and Assembly elections but also in every other way - that they wish to live peacefully together and pursue and understand each other's position, as far as the two traditions are concerned.

Last year, when the Good Friday Agreement was signed, Ireland's Nobel Laureate wrote a one- paragraph poem. For me, this poem, in his inimitable style, encapsulates what everyone was feeling.

"If revolution is the kicking down of a rotten door, evolution is more like pushing the stone from the mouth of the tomb. There is an Easter energy about it, a sense of arrival rather than wreckage. And what is non-parallel about the new conditions is the promise they offer of a new covenant between people living in the country. For once and at long last the language of the Bible can be appropriated by those with a vision of the future rather than those who sing the battle hymns of the past.

Seamus Heaney 11 April 1998."

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim): We all welcome the opportunity to comment on the present political situation. When we met prior to the Good Friday Agreement we thought it could not happen. People said there was no chance of it happening. It happened and has progressed positively from all political dimensions. All political groups involved have done their utmost to live with the commitments in the Agreement. They realised, in living with that commitment, that the electorate also spoke in May last year when an overwhelming majority of the people on the island gave their blessing and support to the Good Friday Agreement. A clear message was sent to all politicians that progress had to be made. The progress since then has been significant. Some people talk of collapse, failure and breakdown but these should not be contemplated by anybody in his right mind who thinks positively as a politician.

Failure would mean a return to what went on for almost 30 years on this island, only on a much larger scale. It would not only be on the island of Ireland. It would become the problem of both Britain and Ireland. Nobody should think that it will not. That is exactly what it will do. All sorts of people will use all sorts of excuses to justify what they may do in the name of patriotism. It does not matter which side they are from. It has been done and will be done. That is not in the interest of the ordinary people of this country.

On decommissioning, I agree with Peter Temple-Morris that "decommission" is a word, that if one does not decommission physically it may be thought that one has not decommissioned. If people have decommissioned in their minds and in their hearts, and accepted that they are going down the political road, they have decommissioned much more positively than if they handed in an AK47 knowing that within 48 hours they will re-equip from other sources right around the world. We can talk about decommissioning until the cows come home, but the reason there will be no decommissioning is simply that the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland feel vulnerable without the same sort of protection of arms as the Unionist community who have the full support of the RUC to guarantee their position. It is sad, particularly when looked at from the RUC perspective, because many very decent people are involved in the RUC. However, it takes only one or two people who do not do their job in a proper manner to destroy the good name of any organisation. The recent developments in Portadown signal much more than people realise. The Nationalist community fear for themselves in certain areas because of what they perceive as collusion by certain sections of the security forces in the Rosemary Nelson murder. We do not know whether this is true or false, but the perception is there, and the Robert Hammill case gives more weight to that perspective. It tells us that the police force in Northern Ireland needs a certain amount of remedial work.

Chris Patten is doing his utmost. The Patten Report will be important in the context of the future policing of Northern Ireland, but it must be accepted that if it does not clearly indicate that there will be an impartial police force in Northern Ireland, we are going to have further problems down the road.

No member of this Body could support David Wiltshire's amendment to the motion for the simple reason that decommissioning is being used by some people as a cover. I honestly believe that Gerry Adams and David Trimble and their supporters, and the various other groups who are involved in the Northern Assembly, have become quite clear in their own minds that they want to move on, and I will be surprised if they do not move down the road of setting up the Executive and putting it in place before Friday of this week. I say because yesterday evening, for the first time, Michael McGimpsey and Mitchell McLoughlin stood shoulder to shoulder to give an interview to UTV. That is something nobody could have contemplated even 12 months ago. There has been progress. There is a will to progress on the part of everybody involved. I hope that nobody will try to use decommissioning as a means of stalling progress on the Agreement. We can decommission all the weapons we like, but if we do not decommission the mind-set of people who are involved in violence, we are going nowhere, because reequipping paramilitaries is as easy as going out to buy the newspaper.

Mr Robert Walter (*Dorset North*): I found John Ellis's contribution somewhat depressing. It seemed to indicate that the debate had not moved on. It is unacceptable that in any part of these islands any section of the community should continue to feel that it has to keep arms in order to protect its position. The emphasis in this debate on decommissioning is not because decommissioning is an end in itself but because it is part of the process towards peace, and it is about confidence in that peace.

From my own perspective and from the perspective of a number of speakers in this debate I think that the British and Irish Governments and the constitutional parties, both Unionist and Nationalist, in Northern Ireland, have jumped every hurdle and fulfilled their obligations under the Good Friday Agreement. It is the paramilitaries, both Loyalist and Republican, who have not; and there has been no effective decommissioning of their illegally-held weapons. That is now a stumbling-block towards the process of moving forward to setting up the Executive. The IRA has to start decommissioning properly. Otherwise the Sinn Féin members of the Assembly cannot become Ministers and the people of Northern Ireland will not get the Executive they deserve and which will once again enable them to have a role in the running of their Province. The paramilitaries have to deliver.

Let me quote from the article that the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, wrote in the *Irish News* and *The Newsletter* newspapers on 11 January. It sums up my position and it emphasises the cross-party consensus that exists in the House of Commons. Tony Blair said:

"But confidence on all sides remains the key to progress, confidence that everyone keep to their obligations under the agreement, including the clear obligation on decommissioning. The Decommissioning Commission has had a number of meetings but with the exception of the LVF no weapons at all so far have come from the main paramilitary groups. All of the Agreement has to be implemented because it all hangs together. But all of us are committed to the aim of seeing the guns not just

silent but taken out of politics for ever. That is why a start to decommissioning would do more to create confidence between the communities than any other single step. We maybe have to remind ourselves what the Agreement was that all those parties signed up to. The decommissioning section of the Good Friday Agreement says that all participants accordingly reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. They also confirm their intention to continue to work constructively and in good faith with the independent Commission to use any influence they may have to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following the endorsement in referendums North and South of the Agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement."

The final sentence of that section says:

"Both Governments will take all necessary steps to facilitate the decommissioning process to include bringing the relevant schemes into force by the end of June."

That was June of last year. I believe we owe it in this meeting to spell out quite clearly what our position is as politicians from both sides of the Irish Sea. That Agreement was signed in the name of the peoples both of Ireland, all of Ireland, and of Great Britain and all the parties to the Agreement have now to deliver. The message from this Body should be that we want to rebuild confidence in that peace, that the guns, the Semtex, the bomb-making equipment all have to go, which means that the focus is very definitely now on Sinn Féin. If Sinn Féin says that it no longer speaks for the paramilitaries and its former supporters, if that is the case, if that is its excuse, if that is what they are now going to hide behind, then that questions its position in the Assembly in the first place. It questions the prospectus on which Sinn Féin was elected to the Assembly. If that is the case, Sinn Féin has disconnected with its own constituency. The message coming from Members of the Houses of Commons and Lords and of the Oireachtas is that if we are to give David Trimble the support he deserves, all the parties on these islands must now tell Sinn Féin it must reconnect with its constituency and demand an immediate start to decommissioning.

Senator Shane Ross: As a newcomer to this Body, I approached this weekend with a certain degree of scepticism in the sense that I felt it might be a mere talking-shop. Somebody commented to me last night that Mo Mowlam is probably not watching these proceedings with baited breath. However, my view now is that this is an absolutely invaluable exercise, not so much for what is said here, which may or may not be worthy of a great deal of attention, but for what happens off-stage in terms of informal meetings. In this very civilised, sophisticated and friendly atmosphere, we have had an opportunity to make each other's acquaintance and come to understand the various points of view expressed. That may not have any tangible or immediate results; but, in the long-term, I feel the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body has a very healthy future and I wish its participants well. I will only be attending every second year as I am alternating with a constituency colleague.

I hope these meetings will serve as a blueprint for other activities outside the political arena. I am elected by the constituency of Trinity College Dublin graduates. Trinity College graduates have held a special and privileged position in the Republic for a very long time. At one time they were allowed to elect three Members of the Senate in order to ensure that members of a minority received some representation. Thankfully, that is no longer necessary.

One of the great bonuses of attending TCD was that a large number of its undergraduates - up to 20 per cent for many years - hailed from Northern Ireland. When I attended the university some 25 years ago, approximately 20 per cent of undergraduates came from the North. The figure has fallen to approximately two per cent now and serves as a salutary lesson of loss to both communities. The great benefit was that people from the North came to Dublin, many of them Protestants, learned a great deal about the Republic and its people and learned that we were not enemies who wanted to take over the North. They went back to Northern Ireland with that knowledge and spread the message there. That no longer happens for reasons I will not go into here but is something we should consider in the broader context of third-level educational exchanges.

Universities in the Republic and the North could provide a location where Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter could meet on an equal footing and exchange views in a friendly, non-hostile atmosphere. That facility, which previously existed in Trinity College, was one of the great losses of the past two decades. This Body could usefully address this matter as an objective for the future. Such exchanges should be encouraged by both Governments and welcomed in Northern Ireland. That is my main plea here today. I do not believe our comments on decommissioning will reach their desired target but we should consider supporting more long-term on-the-ground measures. Universities North and South of the Border could provide long-term impetus and encouragement for the exchange of views which might allow us to get to know each other better.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I thank Senator Ross for his maiden speech.

Mr Harry Barnes (*Derbyshire North East*): Senator Haughey wondered whether once the decommissioning problem was overcome, a further obstacle would be raised - presumably by the Unionist side. I do not believe there is any obstacle aside from decommissioning. Everything is in place at this stage and the parties involved in the Assembly have worked together to achieve that. The decommissioning problem is the only one which remains and it relates to the IRA and Loyalist paramilitary groups. Obviously, any move on this issue by the IRA would end the current logjam.

Other areas are referred to in terms of confidence-building, particularly in connection with the IRA. I refer to issues such as the bodies of the disappeared, problems in regard to intimidation and people being forced into exile. An announcement was made about the bodies of the disappeared and nine of those are now to be returned to their loved ones for burial. Deputy Austin Currie tabled a question on this matter yesterday but we did not have time to take it.

The action on the bodies of the disappeared is an important and welcome move although I regret that the matter came down to the wire. It often seems to be the case with the IRA that anything it does in terms of confidence-building is done at the last minute and forms part of a negotiating game rather than being a genuine expression of concern. However, the announcement will assist in the negotiations which are ongoing in Belfast on the establishment of an Executive.

There has also been some movement in regard to intimidation and beatings. David Trimble called in Amnesty International, a big move on the part of Unionists who are not normally sympathetic to Amnesty's work. It was attention on paramilitary beatings in particular areas that led Sinn Féin to develop a policy of restorative justice under its own umbrella whereby the victims and perpetrators of beatings were brought together. I have nothing against restorative justice once it is pursued through the proper avenues of law and order and with the involvement of social workers. The restorative justice process indicated that the intimidation and beatings problem had gained reaction in the Sinn Féin camp. Since Trimble called Amnesty in, although it has not been free from violence and intimidation, there has been a very different level and the situation is much nearer to being contained. There has been much effort involved in the matter of those who have been exiled from Northern Ireland by paramilitary groups. These people are assisted by bodies such as the Maranatha Christian group in Manchester, Families Against Intimidation and Terror, the Peace Train, New Dialogue and others which have been involved in ensuring support for the argument that this should be ended. President Clinton and others have been fully presented with the arguments on this. Moves to allow those in exile to return, which would require freedom from any dangers of intimidation and violence, would be valuable in assisting the process to develop.

John Ellis talked about the importance of decommissioning people's hearts and minds rather than practical decommissioning. It might be easier to achieve practical decommissioning than to achieve decommissioning of hearts and minds because if hearts and minds believe in decommissioning, there will be no problem engaging in the practical avenues involved in that.

The failure to indicate a decommissioning of hearts and minds is very much part of the problem. Gerry Adams, in interviews given to Ron Bennett in *The Observer* on Sunday, said that the Sinn Féin leadership cannot deliver decommissioning but it would help considerably if the Sinn Féin leadership was seen to be striving fiercely for decommissioning, if it sincerely expressed views to achieve decommissioning, and if we knew that it would work flat out to achieve that. That does not appear to be confirmed, however, in another quotation from the interview with Ron Bennett in which Gerry Adams said, on the decommissioning issue, that we will succeed in changing political conditions and removing the causes of conflict so that either disarmament becomes possible or it becomes irrelevant. The message that sends to the IRA is that it is hoped that in time the issue becomes irrelevant, so there is no need for decommissioning to take place, yet decommissioning is solidly part of the Agreement. We have had the appropriate sections read to us which refer to using any influence that parties may have to achieve decommissioning of all paramilitary

arms within a two-year period. If all the means necessary are being used, the indication will not be given that it might not be required in the end. If it is done and it is irrelevant, it at least meets the requirements contained in the Agreement, and if a timetable is established to achieve it, that clearly is an indication that people are seeking to act within the Agreement and is a sign that hearts and minds are being grabbed on this occasion.

In David Wilshire's amendment before us there is a sense that to begin decommissioning of arms and explosives at once would be very helpful towards getting the Agreement in place with everything acted upon. When this point was put, I believe by David Wilshire, to Mo Mowlam in the House of Commons, her argument was that both the establishment of the Executive and decommissioning are equal requirements contained in the Agreement. The question of which comes before the other is a matter for the parties involved in the discussions, and their agreement is required. That does not mean that there will be no attempt to influence the situation; but it is a matter for the parties concerned whether one precedes the other or some marvellous formula is constructed. We should do everything we can to assist that process and assist the parties involved in reaching an agreement.

That does not mean nothing can be done as far as David Trimble's side is concerned. There is the problem of him not meeting the Garvaghy Road residents. A statement that might be associated with agreement about a timetable for decommissioning is an important area.

Other ideas have been put forward. During Question Time on Northern Ireland in the House of Commons last week, Dale Campbell-Savours asked about the possibility of a purchase of arms from the IRA as a means towards getting rid of their arms, and the matter was not knocked into the long grass. There are various alternative possibilities that can take place to achieve the objective we all seek.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): We will have to try to adhere to four or five minute slots because otherwise a number of people will be disappointed. That is not a criticism of Mr Barnes; neither he nor other colleagues were asked to limit their contributions but I am so doing now because we will be unable to get everyone in otherwise. I ask Members to bear that in mind.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey): On a point of order, we are currently debating David Wilshire's amendment to the resolution. Some of us who may be fortunate in catching your eye may support him or may ask him to withdraw his motion. He is not here and it is rather difficult to get a message to him and I wonder if a tactful message could be sent to him to ask him to return.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): That is an understandable point of order; but David Wilshire was courteous enough to send me a note asking us to excuse his temporary absence and explaining that the local paper wants his comments, not on the position

in Northern Ireland but on cuts at his local hospital - which I am sure is the responsibility of the previous Government. He is now back with us.

Mr Brian O'Shea (Waterford): When I accompanied the other Members of Committee C to Northern Ireland last June, in the process of preparing the report on road and rail links, I was encouraged to hear much of the language of normal politics. We heard statements to the effect that all the money is spent east of the Bann or that some of the projects emanating from west of the Bann do not make any sense. We were seeing an element of what is possible and, in addition, the strong cross-Border links were very visible.

Lord Glentoran mentioned the precarious situation in which David Trimble finds himself. I see merit in the argument that in the present context David Trimble needs a lifeline. The process needs a lifeline. On the other hand, we are here and the action is elsewhere. I hope the progress overnight in the context of the graves of the disappeared is an indication of breakthrough. We do not know what the party leaders and the two Heads of Government know. We are talking about conflict resolution at a symbolic time and at a watershed in the process. There is great symbolism in relation to Good Friday. It is the target date in the context of the Executive.

I wish to refer directly to David Wilshire's amendment. The motion tabled by the Steering Committee contains the language of conflict-resolution. It contains the words and phrases "commends", "welcomes", "reaffirms its faith", and "calls on all parties". Our role as a Body must be to contribute to that process of conflict-resolution. No-one in this room does not have as a long-term aspiration the removing of the bomb and bullet from Irish politics. We want that achieved as speedily as possible,

We are at a critical juncture. In terms of bringing forward what needs to be brought forward this week, the amendment, as proposed, is inappropriate and it should be withdrawn.

As Lord Glentoran said, there are big problems ahead, including the area of policing, the ongoing problem of Drumcree and the aftermath of the assassination of Rosemary Nelson. While all those issues have to be addressed, we must focus on what needs to be done this week. As Lord Glentoran further said, we do not need a fudge because that will not get us anywhere. As other speakers said, we cannot contemplate the alternative. There is too much at stake here. Our good wishes and all our exhortations should be in the direction of those who are making the decisions this week.

Many things are possible. I hope that the advancement made in relation to the graves of the disappeared is an indication of an evolving process which will conclude on Friday in the setting up of the Executive. I hope that there can be normal politics in Northern Ireland, that the various parties there will learn to live with one another and that process of trust and reconciliation can be built up. I fully support the motion

and I appeal to the proposer of the amendment to withdraw it in the interest of what needs to be achieved this week.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (*Cavan-Monaghan*): Ba mhaith liom lácaíocht leis an rún. In supporting this motion I wish to acknowledge that progress has indeed been made in the implementing of the Good Friday Agreement, now almost a year old. Key provisions, as outlined in the motion, have been set in place. A framework has been established for the full implementation of the Agreement, but the most central institution in the Good Friday Agreement has still to be established. The future of the entire Agreement and the direction of the peace process now depends on the establishment of the new Executive, hopefully and preferably this week.

The Executive should have been established long before now. That it has not been established is entirely due to the fact that the Ulster Unionist Party sought to place an obstacle in the way of the full implementation of the Agreement. That obstacle takes the form of an impossible demand on Sinn Féin as a precondition to our entry into the Executive. There is no such precondition in the Good Friday Agreement.

The precondition demanded is decommissioning of IRA weapons and explosives. We have made clear that this is a demand we in the Sinn Féin leadership cannot deliver. David Trimble knows this. He has known this for months. Both Governments also know this. Still David Trimble persists in his demand, as does David Wilshire in his amendment, which I reject.

How can we make progress? That is the question on everyone's lips in this Body this morning and beyond here. I believe and I put it to the Body that the answer is in the Good Friday Agreement. We will make progress by adhering to the Agreement, the Agreement that we all made possible through a painful process of negotiation and compromise a year ago this week.

I acknowledge the difficult compromises involved in the Agreement for David Trimble and for the Unionist Party. It was a real achievement for him to bring his Party to the negotiating table, to emerge with an agreement and to persuade the majority of his supporters to back it. He has maintained that support since. I believe he has the political authority to implement the Agreement in full, if he has the political will to do so.

There needs to be an acknowledgement also from the Ulster Unionist Party and others of the very difficult compromises, which we in Sinn Féin and Irish Nationalists and Republicans generally had to accommodate in order to create the Good Friday Agreement. This has been obscured in the false argument over decommissioning. My Party had to amend key sections of its Constitution, ending opposition to any form of six counties assembly. Nationalists and Republicans in the 26 Counties urged a "yes" vote in the referendum, which amended central provisions of the 1937 Constitution. We did these things in good faith. We entered the Assembly despite the fact that all the repugnant apparatus of the Northern State remained and still remain in place: the armed sectarian RUC, the British Army presence, the emergency legislation and

emergency courts, the biased judiciary, and economic and cultural discrimination against Nationalists. We are prepared to enter an Executive in spite of the fact that all things remain in place, including in excess of 130,000 licensed weapons in the hands of the Unionist community.

We could in conscience and consistent with our politics and our long experience of the Northern State have made the immediate redress of any or all of these injustices a precondition to our participation in the new institutions. If we had insisted on such an approach, we would have ensured that the Agreement was either not achieved or else broken apart once achieved. We could have attempted to rewrite the Agreement and insert impossible preconditions. We have not done so and others must not be allowed to do so either. We understand the fears of the Unionist community. Many of them fear a return to conflict. I believe they have been misled in the belief that the guarantee of no return to conflict is decommissioning. This is a false and dangerous argument. No rational observer of our conflict or indeed of any other global conflict could sustain it. Instead of basing his approach on this argument, I urge David Trimble from this forum today to establish trust on the firm basis of the Agreement we reached last Good Friday. Mind-sets were decommissioned on all sides on that occasion and failure to follow through now will serve only to reverse that process.

Republicans and Nationalists took a leap of faith on Good Friday and so did Unionists. I want to emphasise and make patently clear that we recognise and acknowledge that. We trusted in our own ability to bring about justice, equality, progressive change and lasting peace through this Agreement. That is how decommissioning and the wider question of the demilitarisation of society of which it forms a part can be resolved. I urge Unionists to place their trust in the Agreement and the wider peace process to resolve the issue. Nationalists and Republicans have placed their trust in the Agreement to begin the resolution of the issues of equality and justice, which I cited. It is through the Agreement that mutual trust and political progress can be achieved. I support the proposal of the Steering Committee and join colleagues in opposing the amendment as tabled.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey): Many of us would agree with a good deal of what has just been said, but I believe we would also all agree with the mover of the motion that decommissioning remains the key issue and that there can be no compromise on this. As we are debating Mr Wilshire's amendment and not the substantive motion, we must ask ourselves two questions. Is Mr Wilshire's amendment necessary and is it helpful?

As regards decommissioning, we all want to see some demonstration by the parties concerned of their commitment to the Good Friday Agreement and the supplementary agreements. I accept that both communities feel vulnerable but no one could possibly argue that Semtex is a defensive weapon. If people are interested in self-defence, and everyone should have the right to defend themselves, it is not right for them to retain offensive weapons. The type of gesture we would like to see

is a move towards starting decommissioning by decommissioning offensive weapons, such as Semtex.

On the question of whether Mr Wilshire's amendment is necessary, I repeat what is in the substantive motion which states that this Body "reaffirms its faith in the Agreement as the only way towards a new future of peace and cooperation". We should ask ourselves what is stated in the Agreement. On decommissioning the Agreement states:

"All participants accordingly reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. They also confirm their intention to continue to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission, and to use any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the Agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement."

That is what we are saying we support in the substantive motion. Mr Wilshire's amendment is not necessary because it is already included in the motion.

I do not believe the amendment is helpful in the present sensitive situation with the ongoing talks in Belfast. I ask Mr Wilshire to withdraw it because if he pushes it to a vote and it is defeated, as it probably will be judging from the tenor of the contributions made this morning, it will send the wrong message to the world. We do not want to see a headline in a newspaper which reads: "Body rejects call to begin decommissioning of arms and explosives". That is why his amendment is not helpful or necessary.

Mr Seymour Crawford (*Cavan-Monaghan*): I support the motion tabled by the Steering Committee which provides a valuable and useful opportunity to discuss this issue at a time when our two Government leaders are in delicate negotiations in Belfast which we hope will lead to a successful conclusion of the Good Friday Agreement which was agreed 12 months ago.

The motion refers to cross-Border groups. As someone who has been involved in cross-Border activity all my political life, whether in farming or party politics, I have no doubt the cross-Border bodies will have a major role to play in the future of this island and in building trust, to which Senator Ross referred. It is not often that Senator Ross and I agree but I agree with him that the Body has done a lot to build bridges over the past ten years.

I also welcome the progress made last night on the issue of the disappeared. However, I fear my pessimism that not all the bodies will be located will be justified. Nonetheless, this is a late but positive move. Punishment beatings and intimidation are also continuing and that does not help to build trust. The murder of Rosemary Nelson and others and tragic events such as the Omagh bombing are aimed at creating a background which makes agreement difficult.

The motion supports all parts of the Good Friday Agreement. However, to listen to some speakers one would think that decommissioning was not part of it. A full chapter on decommissioning was written into the Good Friday Agreement which was signed up to by all the participants. We could all use the wording of that chapter in whatever way we like but it is not too different from the chapter on prisoner releases. It is suggested that while prisoner releases must take place at the end of the two-year period they can also take place in the meantime. I am glad that to date over half of the prisoners have been released. It is also suggested that decommissioning must take place at the end of the two-year period and that there should be constant briefing on how that will happen. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be the same commitment or urgency to implement that part of the Agreement.

Everyone here supports the Good Friday Agreement. As someone who publicly sought a "yes" vote for the Agreement, I would have liked others to have done the same. The votes did not show as much support for those in the Ulster Unionist Party, particularly Mr David Trimble, who showed great courage in trying to make the Agreement work as we would have liked. We must remember that the Assembly elections took place afterwards. We cannot ignore the difficulties. We must move forward on all parts of the Agreement. I pay tribute to President Clinton, the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister for their efforts last year and now to find a solution. We cannot expect one section of the Agreement and not others to be moved forward. As Deputy Ó Caoláin said, a lot of progress has been made in the past few years and particularly in the past twelve months. The fault for things not moving further than they are today does not lie on just one side. I urge the Body to support the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and not the parts suggested by any one individual.

I support Michael Colvin's plea that we ask David Wilshire to withdraw his amendment in the interests of total unity on the proposal. We must appreciate that David Wilshire has attended this meeting and has had the guts to raise questions. Existence of this Body could not be justified if we were all to speak from the same hymn-sheet. We are here to have an open discussion. I am sure David Wilshire will understand our plea. The media may try to suggest that this Body does not favour decommissioning. I do not understand that to be the case from the proposal put forward by the Steering Committee. We must progress towards implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in total. That must include a form of decommissioning. If that is not on the agenda, why then would a chapter on it have been included in the Good Friday Agreement? Some people do not like to admit that chapter exists, but it does. Like all chapters it must be implemented.

Senator Helen Keogh: I am glad to have the opportunity to address the motion and the amendment to it. I fully support the motion as tabled by the Steering Committee. It is ironic that we are meeting twelve months from the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Many of us are now more tentative in our remarks because of what is taking place in Northern Ireland. We are once again teetering on the brink. I remain optimistic.

I was pleased to read in an article this morning that the anguish of some people will be resolved by the location of the bodies of those that had disappeared. I believe that agreement can be reached this week. We must ask ourselves why we are here? What do we hope to achieve? I echo previous sentiments in asking David Wilshire to rethink his amendment. I do not wish that type of message to go out from our deliberations.

I was also taken by what Senator Shane Ross, as a new Member to the Body, had to say earlier. I was an Associate Member of this Body between 1989-92. I can see the development of relationships that has taken place and what has been achieved through this Body on an informal basis. It would be detrimental to this Body were we to vote on this amendment. So much has been achieved but so much more remains to be done. We must examine this motion in the context of the future role of this Body. We have put this on the long finger because we are awaiting the result of talks in Northern Ireland. This Body can serve as a model for the development of the East-West relationship. We have shown, through our deliberations and submissions, that there is substance to the work of this Body. I would like to see that work continue. We are able to conduct open debates and agree and disagree; but what is most important is a universal wish to support the Good Friday Agreement and to ensure we have the type of relationships whereby we can speak openly. When we examine amendments such as the one before us we can honestly say we support decommissioning and want to see full implementation of the Agreement. We also wish to have a spirit of unanimity within the Body. I appeal to David Wilshire to withdraw his amendment so that we can all support what is taking place in Northern Ireland and turn our attention to where it is most needed.

Mr Jeff Ennis (*Barnsley East and Mexborough*): I will try to keep my remarks brief. As a relatively new member of this Body I am extremely impressed with the hospitality and the way in which this Body conducts its very important business. This is my first visit to Ireland and I am in no way disappointed. With a surname like Ennis I regard this area as my ancestral home, although my Irish accent has diminished over the last four or five generations to be replaced by my very broad Barnsley accent. One of my Yorkshire colleagues, Bill O'Brien, now regards this castle as his ancestral home. I know he is looking forward to free board and lodgings the next time he comes to Dromoland Castle. There are three types of people in life: those who wish they were born in Yorkshire, those born in Yorkshire and those with no particular ambition whatsoever.

I am sure that David Wilshire is sincere in moving this amendment. However, like him and other members of both Houses, I have sat through and participated in many debates. Whether the Prime Minister or Secretary of State has responded to the debates, the bottom line with has always been that the Good Friday Agreement is sacrosanct. It is an Agreement of consensus. In effect, they are saying they cannot change it. The Agreement is not a fudge, it is crystal clear: we have to press for the full implementation within the timescale laid down. This morning's resolution seeks to achieve that.

We need to look at the words contained in the resolution. The last three lines read: ".....calls on all parties to maintain their commitment and ensure the implementation of all aspects of the Agreement....". As far as I am concerned, David Wilshire's amendment seeks to hasten the full implementation of the Agreement. When we speak of "all aspects of the Agreement", we include the chapter on decommissioning. That is not separate from this motion: it is included in it. Some progress has to be made on decommissioning this week. I hope progress will be made; but if this amendment is agreed to, it will tie the hands of the negotiators in Belfast. I hope, therefore, David Wilshire will consider withdrawing the amendment at the conclusion of this morning's debate.

Mr Séamus Kirk (*Louth*): I am glad of the opportunity to make a short contribution to the debate, which has clearly been very worthwhile in the context of what is happening at the moment. There is no doubt that we all agree things have come a long way. Those who have been in politics for a few years will reflect on the last ten or 20 years when despair rather than optimism was the order of the day. It has been a slow and torturous path and turning back now would be unthinkable. We are within sight of the finishing line. For those involved in the talks today and over the weekend, history awaits the outcome of their deliberations.

We have now reached an impasse; but how often have we heard that phrase in the context of the Northern Ireland talks? There is no doubt that courage and vision have been shown by both sides in enabling us to reach this stage. We need more courage and vision to continue the momentum in order to bring us over the line. The building of trust and confidence is clearly an ongoing process. We have not reached a stage where there is absolute trust and confidence on the part of both sides in terms of their respective positions. Gestures and symbolism always release a new dynamic. Sometimes that dynamic can be positive but sometimes it may be negative.

Those of us who welcomed the agreement foresaw the day when the issue of decommissioning would become a major stumbling block. We all wish for a gunless society in Northern Ireland. That was and is the long-term objective of everybody here at this conference. It is also the objective of the respective parties in the Northern talks.

It brings me to the question, what is the possibility of an agreed time-frame within which to decommission all the arms in the North and the possibility of such a time-frame running parallel with the implementation of the Agreement? That would offer the prospect of the present impasse being neutralised. Perhaps it is a simplistic analysis but there is no doubt from what we hear through the grapevine and from talking to people that there is a considerable amount of arms in the North. Perhaps the simultaneous decommissioning on all sides would offer the prospect of getting around this impasse. I, along with other speakers, appeal to David Wilshire to consider withdrawing his amendment. The possibility of the amendment being put to a vote and of the subsequent adverse publicity will do no good for the cause at this time.

We all welcome last night's announcement on progress as regards identifying the graves of missing people in the North. We can only begin to appreciate the trauma, sorrow and anguish of the families of those who have lost individuals in the Troubles in the past 25 to 30 years. The start in identifying the graves of missing people is welcome. Let us hope that all the graves can be identified, that the families of those who have lost loved ones can bury them and that we, as a community, can share in their bereavement.

I support the Steering Committee's motion, which is positive, worthwhile and reflects present needs. Let us hope that when we meet again next September, the progress for which we all wish will have been made in the interim.

Lord Blease: I wish to record my support for the Steering Committee motion. The Agreement establishing an Assembly in Northern Ireland will be duly signed and will commence the devolved powers of parliamentary democracy in Northern Ireland. I recall ten years ago when the more constructive peace discussions commenced, reconciliation was the emotive driving force. This proved to be more of an ecclesiastical hurdle, which was difficult for mortals to comprehend and achieve. The consultations based on finding practical human relations and understandings forming areas of accommodation for living, good- neighbourliness, relationships of employment, parity of esteem, housing and education for our children all came about through understanding and making accommodating arrangements. This has proved more realistic, practical and lasting than anything which would have been achieved by a concept of some ecclesiastical reconciliation and has been based on the needs of people in Northern Ireland.

This Body has been in the forefront of founding these understandings and areas of accommodation. They should be more lasting in the interests of Northern Ireland and the future of the peoples of these islands. I do not accept the Doomsday approach. Whatever the outcome of the next few days, the future for the people of Northern Ireland and these islands will be more wholesome, honourable and constructive and better for our children and neighbours largely because it is based on a practical accommodation.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): On behalf of the Steering Committee, I thank the Members who have contributed for their general acceptance of the broad terms of the proposed motion. We tried to anticipate the views of the Body, and its response has been encouraging and reassuring. David and I decided it was important that David Wilshire should have the opportunity to move and debate his amendment, and I believe Members will agree it was an excellent exercise in democratic expression. We feel vindicated by that and encouraged by David Wilshire's acknowledgement that the terms of the motion were acceptable. As the mover of the amendment, he will respond now, having listened to all the contributions.

Mr David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Before I come to the amendment, I apologise for having had to leave for a moment. I hope all elected politicians will understand that when one's local newspaper with a noon deadline rings about cuts to the Accident

and Emergency Department in one's constituency one's priorities are pretty well focused - so I made a telephone call and returned.

As the Co-Chairman said, it has been an interesting and constructive debate. As always, the unpopular minority view, something in which I seem to have specialised, has once again been listened to courteously and thoughtfully. As always, I am eternally grateful for that. I said before, and it bears repeating, it is real proof of the maturity of this Body that it can have such debates. It can accept amendments in good faith and consider them calmly and rationally. I made notes of all the contributions and will be happy to respond to all of them, although I heard the Co-Chairman's point about the time we must finish. I would be happy to respond to all the contributions. However, bearing in mind the Co-Chairman's strictures on time I take the view that if I respond to one I respond to all. I will be happy to continue the debate over lunch.

I hear what has been said. I have been thinking hard during the morning. Please believe that I wish to help. I listened especially carefully to everything because the views expressed are held by people I call my friends rather than my political opponents.

However, it is unrealistic to duck the decommissioning issue. My amendment calls for an admission of the problem and an attempt to deal with it. While a motion that ignores decommissioning carries limited credibility, an amendment that is rejected could also raise issues of credibility. In view of this I am faced with the dilemma of where to strike the balance between those two problems Do I press the amendment or do I vote against the motion?

I conclude that the greatest help I can offer this process at present is to try and reassure the Unionists. It is no secret where I come from in this debate. I judge that the Unionists need reassurance more than anything else.

It is correct for some here to worry about headlines. It is possible that we may get the headline that the Body rejects an amendment on decommissioning and it is possible that this may harm the Body. I am aware of that and I do not, therefore, lightly propose the amendment. However, I conclude that the headline that says that the whole Body ignores Unionist fears would not just harm it but would also harm the peace process. In view of this I judge that my constructive role is to speak up for the Unionists and to ensure that the official record shows that somebody has done so. I believe this would help rather than hinder. I take comfort in the fact that the damage, and the justification for people worrying about the outcome of this debate, would arise if anybody voted against the motion rather than focus on the amendment. In that spirit I move the amendment.

Mr Kevin McNamara (*Kingston upon Hull North*): I listened carefully to what David Wilshire said. When the amendment is put I must, on behalf of the Steering Committee, urge colleagues to vote against it. I say this with regret because I believe that, as the Co-Chairman and Jeff Ennis have pointed out, the spirit of what David

Wilshire is saying is contained within the motion and in that last part of it which calls on all parties to maintain their commitment and ensure the implementation of all aspects of the Agreement. Contained therein is the burden upon all the parties to use their good offices to obtain decommissioning by May 2000. That is the commitment to which people signed up.

It would be wrong of us not to understand the effect of our accepting or rejecting the amendment. In one sense it would mean we were preempting the negotiating positions of the parties meeting in Belfast at present. That would not be helpful to any of them, although some would seize upon it. To reject it can equally be seen as helping other parties. I do not believe that this Body, over the time it has been in existence, has sought to take a specific side, other than against violence, to influence the decisions that would emerge from ongoing negotiations. Ultimately, it is what the parties in the negotiations - the Unionists, SDLP, Sinn Féin - are able to agree which will be of importance. Other than in our condemnation of violence we should not be seen to be levering for one side or another in this way but to say that we wish them well and hope they reach a conclusion with which all the parties in Northern Ireland can live.

We all have our own bits of history at this meeting. Within the parties in the Republic of Ireland there are different attitudes to the history of the North and its relationships with the South. There are also different attitudes in the British parties. We would all claim that there may be a perfect solution from our point of view. However, the solution is not ours; it is to be found among the parties to the negotiations. It is my belief, and I understand it is also the view of the Steering Committee, that it is important, therefore, that we should not be seen to be coming down overwhelmingly on one side or the other. Even at this last moment I hope that Mr Wilshire will not put the amendment to a vote.

We have had a very interesting debate with over 20 members of the Body contributing. Looking at the problems that exist it has been a very sober debate. Lord Glentoran used a phrase which could apply to all parties within the debate - although he used it in specific reference to the Unionists' attitude to the Agreement - when he said that they do not all see it that way and on the issue of decommissioning they do not all see it that way either.

In 1969 I recall sitting in my mother's front room just outside Liverpool directing the movements of British troops in Belfast on the Sunday after the Apprentice Boys' march. I received telephone calls from the late Lady Fitt in connection with meetings by Unionists or Loyalist gangs and their threats to burn people out. I communicated these to the Home Office, which then had to communicate them to Belfast. It illustrates what had happened when the RUC had broken down, when people did not have information and the Army went in without street maps of Belfast coloured orange and green.

The significance of these events was that two things appeared on street gable ends before the wonderful pictures. One was a poster by People's Democracy which read,

"The Malone fiddles while the Falls burns". The other read, "IRA equals I ran away". The Nationalist communities in Belfast and elsewhere felt unprotected; and that memory lingers still among the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland, and in Belfast in particular. It lingers in not just those who vote for Sinn Féin, but for other Nationalists who vote for the SDLP. They remember that particular occasion, and people should bear that in mind. They should bear it in mind also if decommissioning comes about in relation to the role of the RUC. If Kosovo had not happened, I believe that in the past week we would have had headlines of the report of the Independent Commission on Police Complaints into the handling by the Royal Ulster Constabulary of the accusations made by Rosemary Nelson and upheld by the Complaints Commission, which had to bring in an outside force to supervise that inquiry. Bearing this and the Hamell case in mind, one is asking people to depend on an organisation they do not wholly trust to look after their interests if decommissioning takes place.

We must recognise that these worries exist. They are integral to the problem and we must take them on board. One must see this in the context of where Sinn Féin is negotiating in Belfast at present, and the risks they believe they would take in keeping the whole of their organisation together, if they undertook a decision on decommissioning outside the terms of the Agreement, without having something positive to show that people would have security and that trust would be maintained. Equally, Mr Trimble has a memory from the past hanging over him: this memory of Brian Faulkner. He must wonder whether he can take his political troops with him to maintain his position and come to an agreement. It would be as wrong for us to minimise the difficulties Mr Trimble has as to suggest that the Sinn Féin leadership can do something which they would find extremely difficult.

There are real difficulties which must be addressed. We must realise that in the negotiations which are taking place, movement, which to many of us might seem very slight, could be an enormous and dangerous step if taken by the leaderships of Sinn Féin and the Unionists. It is our duty, and the duty of the Governments, to try to create an atmosphere whereby they feel they can confidently make the movement we would regard as small, but they would regard as momentous. This is the reason we must keep our discussions within the context of the British-Irish Agreement, because within that Agreement both sides felt they were able to make concessions. We must try to keep our discussions within the spirit of the Agreement, all together and moving forward; we must not cherry-pick. This will be difficult because people have adopted positions from which they will find it very difficult to move. There has been some movement in the past few months. There have been changes and there was good news last night of some bodies being released. On the part of the Republican movement, there has been an indication of their going back to some of the papers they originally put forward during the British-Irish Agreement in terms of what would happen to arms and decommissioning. This is being resurrected.

Similarly, the Unionist side has moved from the position whereby decommissioning would mean the assembling of all the rifles and Semtex outside Belfast City Hall and being ceremoniously destroyed, to an understanding that there would be something creditable on the table which could be lived with and accepted. There has been

movement and it is our duty to try to push that forward. We will push it forward by supporting the motion as it stands. Roger Stott said that the alternative was too horrendous to contemplate. In one sense this is true. However, there is provision in the Agreement for a reexamination of the situation by the two Governments - not a renegotiation - if things do not work. We politicians must work for a positive result. However, if this does not happen, it is our duty to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down, and keep working to achieve the peace, because it is within the principles contained in the British-Irish Agreement and the Downing Street Declaration that the final resolution must be achieved.

I have a comment about Charles Flanagan's history of County Clare and President de Valera. I was brought up in a household where de Valera was not regarded as one of the family gods, rather that Larkin and Connolly were a working majority in the Holy Trinity. When I once told my father about Lloyd George's comment that when he was negotiating with de Valera and de Valera was being bested by Lloyd George - this is Lloyd George's version - Lloyd George claimed that de Valera always went back to Cromwell. My father's comment was, "Typical of de Valera, only giving half the case." However, there was one politician from County Clare who should be mentioned, because he is in many ways a symbol of hope for us. He is a former Labour TD who was elected during the second last election, Dr. Bamji. He was a character in his own right, but when he was elected his first comment was, "In my adopted country I can be elected to its Parliament. In the country in which I was born, I would still not have the vote." That the people of Clare could elect an Asian South African puts them in the same long line as O'Connell and de Valera of maintaining the idea of parliamentary liberty but also that that change could take place in South Africa. While I do not like all the comparisons being made, it should give us hope that we can achieve what we want to achieve in the North. I beg, therefore, to press the motion on behalf of the Steering Committee and, regretfully, say that if David persists in pushing his amendment we should vote it down.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol East): On a point of order, may I seek guidance from the Chair as to whether, procedurally, it is in order for an amendment to be put to this Body if it has not been seconded? My understanding is that in such circumstances if the amendment has not been withdrawn it must fall.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I have been informed that a seconder is not required for an amendment to be moved. David has formally moved his amendment. Does he wish to have it put to the Body at this point?

Mr David Wilshire (Spelthorne) indicated assent.

And the Question being put, That the Amendment be made:-It was negatived.

And the Main Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body commends the two Governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland for the progress made in implementing the Good Friday

Agreement, in particular the further agreements reached on the Government Departments in Northern Ireland and the North/South Implementing Bodies; further supports the four supplementary International Agreements providing for the establishment of the North/South Ministerial Council and Implementation Bodies, the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference which were signed in Dublin Castle on 8 March by both Governments; welcomes the approval expressed in both Parliaments of the British-Irish Agreement and the Supplementary Agreements; reaffirms its faith in the Agreement as the only way towards a new future of peace and cooperation; looks forward to the early transfer of devolved powers to the Assembly in Northern Ireland; and calls on all parties to maintain their commitment and ensure the implementation of all aspects of the Agreement..

The sitting continued in private.

The sitting continued in public.

3. ADJOURNMENT

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I move formally:

That the Body do now adjourn.

I want to express our warm appreciation to all of you for your contributions during the course of this very positive conference. The response outside is sometimes warmer than we would appreciate. I would also like to thank the press for their attendance. They have acknowledged that this Body has been pursuing a very consistent and positive role and that it has based on very good personal relationships, understanding and mutual respect for positions that we might not always spontaneously agree with. This morning's debate has been the perfect example of that.

We appreciate that the motion we put to the Steering Committee was unanimously endorsed by this Body and, once again, it underlines the fact that the Governments and the political parties who are directly involved in these very sensitive but crucially important negotiations at this time can rely, as a matter of fundamental understanding, on this Body to be positive and supportive in whatever way we can be. Those of you who have been here longer than I will have seen the manner in which this Body has evolved and the very consistent approach that we have adopted on all matters. I am very happy that it has happened here in Dromoland; as I said last night this has a very special significance. My only regret is that I invited the current Earl of Inchiquin, Conor O'Brien, who has been away, to join us before we leave, but he will not get back in time. However, he has expressed his goodwill and appreciation of the fact that we are here in the ancient seat of the O'Brien family. We reciprocate his wishes of goodwill.

I thank our secretariat and staff, which I omitted to do yesterday. We have all been very conscious of the hospitality, warmth and comfort of Dromoland, and we could not have arranged this without the vigorous and active involvement of our staff. A relaxed atmosphere is often the result of a lot of preparatory work. He does not want me to mention him, but I thank John Roycroft, who will be arranging the meeting in Cambridge next September with Frank Cranmer. The William Smith O'Brien I referred to last night was a Cambridge graduate, which shows another link between Dromoland and Cambridge.

I thank Veronica Carr and Rosanna Losty who have spent a lot of time consulting the Dromoland staff to ensure that the conference turned out as it has done. I also thank George Hegarty and Stephen Dawson, as well as the staff of our Parliamentary Debates Office, who have arranged the facilities we have used so effectively.

This has been a very special event for me, and it could not have been so without your very active participation. I will leave the last word to my Co-Chairman.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): There is no need. I thank Deputy O'Kennedy for chairing the meeting in his usual efficient and humorous way.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I declare closed the 18th Plenary Session of the Body, which will next meet in Plenary Session in Cambridge from Monday 13 September to Wednesday 15 September 1999.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body do now adjourn.

The Session concluded at 12. 05 pm.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform what consideration his Government has given to the Republic of Ireland becoming a full member of the Western European Union.

Minister O'Donoghue: Ireland does not intend to seek full membership of the Western European Union.

Following the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, Ireland took up Observer status at the Western European Union in response to an invitation by the WEU Council of Ministers, and on the basis of the relationship created between the EU and WEU in the Maastricht Treaty, whereby the EU could ask the WEU to elaborate and implement actions of the EU which have defence implications.

Observer status has been a positive experience for Ireland, particularly in light of the growing focus of the EU and WEU on peacekeeping and crisis management tasks, areas in which Ireland has been active since joining the UN. The Amsterdam Treaty, which is due to come into force before the Summer, will give further focus to the WEU's role in peacekeeping and crisis management through the so-called Petersberg tasks.

The Observers at the WEU are Denmark, and the four Non-Allied EU nations - Ireland, Austria, Finland and Sweden.

QUESTION 2

Senator Joe Costello: To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when it is proposed to establish the British-Irish Council, the Council of the Isles, where it will be located and the range of its activities and functions.

QUESTION 5

Dr. Norman Godman MP (*Greenock and Inverclyde*): What recent discussions have taken place with the United Kingdom Government concerning matters relating to the British-Irish Council.

Minister O'Donoghue: I propose to take Questions 2 and 5 together.

Following discussions between the two Governments and consultations with the parties in Northern Ireland, the supplementary International Agreement providing for the establishment of the British-Irish Council was signed in Dublin on 8 March by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The legislative framework for the establishment of the Council is therefore now in place.

In accordance with the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, and the supplementary Agreements signed in Dublin, the British-Irish Council, along with the North/South Ministerial Council, the Implementation Bodies, the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the devolution of legislative and executive powers to the Assembly, will take place at the same time as the entry into force of the British-Irish Agreement.

It is the hope of the Irish and British Governments that, once the present difficulties, regarding decommissioning and the establishment of the shadow Executive are resolved, all the necessary arrangements for the entry into force of the British-Irish Agreement can be rapidly completed, and the first meetings of the British-Irish Council, and the other institutions, can take place.

The two Governments have also been making preparations at official level for the operation of the British-Irish Council (BIC). Suggestions regarding the procedural working of the BIC and its initial work programme have been put to the parties in Northern Ireland. Of course, it will be for the members of the BIC, once it is established, to take final decisions on these matters.

In addition to consultations with the parties in Northern Ireland, both Governments have had informal preliminary discussions with the other potential members of the BIC, The Irish Government, in particular, has taken the step of opening new Consulates General in Edinburgh and Cardiff, in order to develop our contacts and relations with the new devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.

It is difficult at this early stage, before a devolved administration has come into being in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, to predict exactly how the British-Irish Council will operate in practice. However, it will have the potential to discuss practical projects of cooperation between its members across the whole range of areas in which they are competent.

It is envisaged at this stage that meetings of the British-Irish Council, at both summit level and the level of sectoral meetings of Ministers, will be hosted by the various members of the Council and held in different locations. Due to the disparities in size of the participating administrations, however, it is not suggested that there need be any strict rotation of meeting locations.

QUESTION 3

Mrs Maria Fvfe, Labour (Scotland): To ask the Minister for Justice what proposals he has for dealing with poverty in rural areas.

Minister O'Donoghue: There are a broad range of initiatives in progress to deal specifically with the issues of rural poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.

In 1997 the Government launched the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) for the purpose of tackling poverty and social exclusion as one of the major challenges facing Irish society. The NAPS is a major cross-Departmental policy initiative by Government designed to place the needs of the poor and the socially excluded among the issues at the top of the national agenda in terms of Government policy development and action. The, overall target is "over the period 1997-2007, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy will aim at considerably reducing the numbers of those who are "consistently poor" from 15.9% to less than 5-10%, as measured by the ESDI."

The NAPS is a broad strategic policy approach based on the 5 key themes of educational disadvantage, unemployment income adequacy, disadvantaged urban areas and rural poverty. Institutional arrangements to implement the strategy have been introduced which include the preparation of baseline statements and annual work plans by all Departments. A key feature of the policy response has been the introduction of 'poverty proofing' procedures into all aspects of Government policy formulation to ensure these policies do not include any action which would adversely affect those living in or at risk of poverty.

The Government has also entered into a national agreement with the Social Partners, "Partnership 2000 for, Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness", which

has amongst its objectives "ensuring that Irish society becomes more inclusive, that long-term unemployment is substantially reduced and that the benefits of growth are more equally distributed. The agreement contains a comprehensive range of commitments by Government to achieving these aims many of which relate to rural problems.

In addition new developments in Local Government will facilitate the targeting of supports to those areas most in need. Closer co-operation between local groups and public authorities will improve the service to rural dwellers and ensure equity and effectiveness in the delivery of assistance.

More specifically, the Government has established the Western Development Commission on a statutory basis which will specifically target seven of the most underdeveloped counties in the West and North-West of the country. A Western Investment Fund has also been established to help the Commission in its function of promoting the economic and social development of the West.

Measures operated by the Department of Agriculture and Food include income support, through the operation of, inter alia, the adage and premiums payments.

Other targeted initiatives being implemented include training schemes, establishment of an Expert Working Group on Childcare, implementing a pilot programme on the integrated provision of public services as well as support for community and local development groups.

A Government White Paper on Rural Development is currently being drafted. This will deal with rural development as a multi-dimensional, integrated process involving the economic, social, cultural and environmental conditions which influence the quality of life in rural communities. The White Paper will endorse the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and contain a strong focus on addressing poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.

The Government is currently preparing a National Development Plan in the context of the next round of Structural Funds. In addition to enhancing productive potential and contributing to balanced regional development, the objective of the Plan is to contribute to continue the growth in sustainable employment and to re-integrate the long-term unemployed, and those at risk of becoming so, into the economic mainstream.

A briefing document on Government activity in the area of rural exclusion will be circulated by the Secretariat.

QUESTION 4

Mr Caoimhghín O'Caoláin, T.D., (Cavan-Monaghan): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if the Irish Government will initiate a fully independent inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of May, 1974.

Minister O'Donoghue: I can confirm that I have received a request for the establishment of a Tribunal of Enquiry into the Dublin/Monaghan bombings from a Committee of Victims and relatives of those killed or injured.

The bombings which took place in Dublin and Monaghan on Friday 17 May, 1974 were among the most appalling outrages in the history of this island. Three car bombs exploded without prior warning within a few minutes of each other at around 5.30 p.m. in the centre of Dublin. The bombs, which had been placed in Parnell Street, Talbot Street, and South Leinster Street, resulted in 26 persons being killed. Later at 6.58 p.m., a fourth no-warning car bomb exploded outside Greacen's Pub on the North Road in Monaghan Town resulting in a further 7 persons being killed. More than 240 persons required hospital treatment as a result of the four bombs. Not only did the bombings result in thirty-three lives being lost but a great many more lives - of the injured, of friends and of relatives - were scarred forever.

The bombings were the subject of an intensive Garda investigation over a protracted period of time. Those investigations involved extensive interviewing of potential witnesses, forensic examination of the scenes of the explosions and of items recovered, and contact with the RUC.

Confidential information available to the Garda at the time also led the investigation team to examine evidence against a number of loyalist suspects. Unfortunately, despite those intensive inquiries, it was not possible to bring charges against any person at that time, due to lack of sufficient evidence to bring the matter to Court.

In July, 1993 a television documentary on the bombings was broadcast which purported amongst other things to identify the culprits. A review of the investigation carried out in 1974 was undertaken as part of new Garda inquiries into the events of May, 1974 following this broadcast. Those inquiries involved interviewing the programme makers, persons who appeared on the programme and other persons who the Garda believed might be able to assist with the new investigation with the assistance of police forces in other jurisdictions where necessary. The overall outcome of this interviews was that no new evidence came to light and no information was received which would lead to any person being made amenable for the crimes in question despite the tenor of the assertions made on the programme.

While one cannot have anything but sympathy for those affected, I am unconvinced that the particular form of Enquiry sought by the Committee would be the right course of action to take.

It is important not to overlook the fact that the Garda investigation file on these bombings remains open. The objective of any Garda investigation is to secure evidence which would be sufficient to bring before the courts those believed to be responsible. That is not something which can be achieved by a Tribunal of Enquiry. While evidence has not been obtained to-date on which a prosecution could be

based, the position is that if any new information should emerge which might bring the culprits to justice, it will be rigorously pursued by the Garda.

I should also say that since my appointment, I have been anxious to do anything I can to address the needs of all those who have suffered as a result of violent action associated with the conflict in Northern Ireland. I obtained Government approval last May for the establishment of the Victims Commission headed by former Taoiseach, Mr. John Wilson, who was asked to identify what further measures need to be taken to acknowledge and address the suffering and concerns of these persons and, in particular the needs and concerns of victims and the family of victims of violence connected to the Dublin/Monaghan bombings.

I understand that Mr. Wilson has consulted with the victims and relatives of victims of the Dublin/Monaghan bombings on a number of occasions in the course of his work and that he hopes to be in a position to submit his report soon. You may be assured that I will give careful consideration to the contents of the report when same is to hand.

QUESTION 6

Charles Flanagan, T.D. (Laois-Offaly): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform whether he proposes to take steps towards the setting up of a joint Parliamentary Forum, comprising members from the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas and what terms of reference he would envisage for such a body.

Minister O'Donoghue: The Good Friday Agreement states that the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly will consider developing a joint parliamentary forum, bringing together equal numbers from both institutions for discussion of matters of mutual interest and concern.

While the Irish Government strongly supports the formation of a joint North/South parliamentary forum, this is a matter for both Houses of the Oireachtas to consider with the Northern Ireland Assembly.

QUESTION 7

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will make a statement on the policy of the Irish Government over the question of the decommissioning of arms and explosives by the paramilitary organisations

Minister O'Donoghue: The issue of decommissioning of illegally held arms was addressed by all the parties to the negotiations which led to the Good Friday Agreement and the Agreement sets out the result of those negotiations.

In the Good Friday Agreement all the parties recalled their earlier agreement that the resolution of the decommissioning issue is an indispensable part of the process of negotiation. The parties also noted the progress made by the Independent

International Commission on Decommissioning and the two Governments in developing schemes for the achievement of decommissioning of illegally-held arms in the possession of paramilitary groups.

In the Agreement all the participants reaffirmed their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations and confirmed their intention to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission, and to use any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years of the referendums endorsing it and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement.

The Government has stressed the importance of securing the decommissioning of illegally held arms held by paramilitary organisations in both jurisdictions and it wants to see decommissioning achieved as quickly, as possible. Decommissioning of illegally held arms is an essential part of the Good Friday Agreement and progress in this area will play a vital part in the whole process.

The Decommissioning Scheme and Regulations which were put in place by both Governments established the framework for the achievement of decommissioning of illegally held arms. The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning was established so that those who hold illegal arms could be assured that decommissioning would be carried out under independent auspices, independent of both Governments that is, but in a way that was also verifiable. The Independent Commission has continued to fulfil its central role in the process since it was established and the Government has full confidence in its members in carrying out their difficult task.

In line with its mandate to report periodically to both Governments on their activities, the members of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning have regular meetings with Ministers and officials of both Governments. Together with Minister of State Ingram I have met with members of the Commission on three occasions. Most recently I met with the Commission on 21 January this year. Officials from my Department have met with them on six occasions, including five occasions jointly with British officials. The purpose of these meetings is to enable the Commission to appraise the Governments on progress in the discharge of their mandate.

The Commission also holds regular meetings with the parties in Northern Ireland. I understand that members of the Decommissioning Commission including its Chairman General de Chastelain, met with members of this Body earlier this month.

The nomination of Martin McGuinness by Sinn Féin to liaise with the Commission was a significant step as were the nominations of Billy Hutchinson by the UVF and Red Hand Commando and Pastor Kenny McClinton by the LVF. It is clear that the Commission is being seen as having an important role to play in the process. These developments are to be welcomed as a sign of progress.

The Taoiseach has addressed the issue of decommissioning on many occasions. He has stated that it is not helpful if parties reiterate entrenched positions and become more defensive in the process. He emphasised that we have all invested a great deal of time on this process and if we are to make progress, we must face up to the reality of difficult issues. There must be a willingness on all sides to live up to the commitments entered into in the Agreement and to press ahead with its implementation.

Our meeting here takes place at a time when there is again a major attempt underway involving both Governments at the highest level and all the parties to advance the process set out in the Good Friday Agreement. Hopefully the approaching anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement will act as a spur and increase the determination of all sides to produce a successful outcome.

QUESTION 8

Mr John Ellis TD (*Sligo Leitrim*): If there has been any discussion with regard to the setting up of a special task force for industrial development in the Border regions North and South.

Minister O'Donoghue: Industrial development in the Border regions is currently benefiting from many industrial and economic development measures of bodies such as the International Fund for Ireland and the European Union Structural Fund - supported Interreg programme. The industrial development work of the two Governments and their respective agencies is continuing. In the case of my own Government, I can add that attention to regional requirements in relation to the programmes of agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland has been intensified in recent times.

The proposed establishment of a North/South Body for Trade and Business Development, agreed by the two Governments and part of the recently legislated package of measures to implement the Good Friday Agreement has particular significance and potential for the development of the Border region as do the other Implementation Bodies and the areas for co-operation which have been agreed.

The Implementation bodies have come about as a result of intensive negotiations involving all sides, including, the British and Irish Governments and the parties in Northern Ireland. Together with the North/South Ministerial Council and the British/Irish Council, they offer us an opportunity to copperfasten the peace process and to redefine the relationships between both sections of our community. The new working procedures which these bodies will provide will allow us to begin the process of ensuring the economic prosperity of the Border regions which have suffered most as a result of the Troubles. The proposed new Trade and Business Development Body will complement the work of existing agencies and in some specific cases assume certain functions currently executed by existing enterprise support agencies. The existing enterprise support agencies North and South will continue to be funded by and operate under the direction of their respective

administrations and in drawing up and agreeing the functions and activities of the new Body care has been taken to avoid duplication.

The focus of the Trade and Business Development Body will be on business development opportunities North and South. Its main functions will include:-

- Developing co-operation on business development opportunities North and South;
- Developing new approaches to business development in a cross-border context, in areas such as research, training, marketing and quality improvement;
- Supporting business by making recommendations to increase enterprise competitiveness in a North/South context in areas such as skills availability, telecoms, information technology and electronic commerce;
- Promoting North/South trade and supply chains, including through business linkages and partnerships-;
- Promoting, under its own brand, cross border trade events and marketing initiatives, including identification of new areas of trade promoting market awareness and researching measures to raise the level of trade or remove any artificial impediments to trade,
- Undertaking other specific Projects and events in relation to trade promotion when tasked jointly to do so including bringing forward proposals for consideration by the North/South Ministerial Council on specific projects in these areas.

In addition the Body will review the scope, extent and effectiveness of relevant existing activities undertaken by Agencies and Departments North and South and recommend to the NSMC for consideration and decision areas where cross-border co-operation would add value and ways of extending and deepening such co-operation. Specifically the Body must bring forward to the NSMC within three months proposals on the development of a North/South equity investment fund together with proposals on placement programmes, arrangements for testing services and for implementing standards development and certification programmes on a North/South basis for consideration and decision by the NSMC.

The Body will have a special focus on the area of Science and Technology. There already exists a shared appreciation of the importance to economic development of Science, Technology, Research and Innovation. The Body will administer a number of programmes in this area with a view to improving competitiveness. It will also examine options for the achievement of greater coherence and deepening of research and development North and South including drawing on the findings and recommendations emerging from the Foresight Initiatives in the UK and Ireland.

The arrangements applying to the Bodies provide for the payment of grants from voted monies by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Dáil Éireann. It is estimated that in its first full year of operation the Trade and Business Development Body will have a budget of £11.5m (approx) and a total staff complement of 42. In general, except

for some specific exceptions, costs will be shared on the basis of 30% North, 70% South. The Body will be empowered to employ its own staff by means of open recruitment, temporary secondment and the transfer of staff. Pending the formal appointment of the Chief Executive the functions of the Chief Executive will be exercised by a person to be designated by the Irish Government and the British Government.

I believe that the establishment of this new Trade and Business Development Body will be of substantial benefit to business North and South. Provisional trade figures for the first ten months of 1998 show that trade continues to grow. The scope for increasing this trade and for co-operation in selling to overseas markets is considerable. In recent years the business community North and South has provided strong and courageous leadership in pointing to the economic price of conflict and instability and in urging a generous and pragmatic approach to reconciliation.

QUESTION 9

Mr. Kevin McNamara (*Kingston upon Hull North*): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will make a statement on the progress being made towards the establishment of a Northern Ireland Executive.

Minister O'Donoghue: The overriding priority of the Government continues to be the earliest

implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in all its aspects. We are working closer with the British Government and with the political parties in Northern Ireland to achieve this objective. Considerable progress has already been made in the implementation process and work is continuing.

Although formation of the Executive remains the key outstanding issue, considerable progress on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement has been made in recent weeks. On 16 February, the Assembly endorsed a final report by the First and Deputy First Ministers on areas for North-South Implementation Bodies, the British Irish Council and the Civic Forum by 78 votes to 28. It also approved a final determination on government departments by 77 votes on 29. On 8 March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland signed supplementary agreements providing for the establishment of the North/South Ministerial Council, All-Island Implementation Bodies, the British-Irish Council and British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. Legislation enabling the establishment of Implementation Bodies was subsequently passed by the Oireachtas and Westminster.

Despite progress in these areas, it has not proved possible to resolve the impasse on the formation of the Executive and decommissioning. As you know, the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister will be travelling to Belfast this week in a further very intensive effort to advance the implementation of the Agreement

including the decommissioning issue. I myself will, in fact, be travelling to Belfast later today to participate in the endeavour.

On March 1, the Secretary of State circulated draft Standing Orders which would allow for the appointment of the Executive by the d'Hondt process (whereby seats on the Executive are allocated to parties in proportion to the number of seats they hold in the Assembly). The Secretary of State has indicated her intention to proceed with the d'Hondt process at the next meeting of the Assembly, in the week starting 29 March (the week of Good Friday).

The solution to the current impasse lies in the building of trust on both sides. Both Governments are working on ways in which the necessary confidence on both sides can be built. We are both in agreement that we cannot allow one issue to block progress on full implementation of the Agreement.

QUESTION 10

Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD (*Kerry North*): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will outline the recent discussions which have taken place between the Irish and British Governments or between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Office regarding the Garvaghy Road impasse.

QUESTION 14

Dr. Rory O'Hanlon TD (*Cavan-Monaghan*): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he is aware of the potential for further community division in the Drumcree impasse; and what plans the two Governments have to resolve the situation.

Minister O'Donoghue: The Government have remained in close contact with the British Government and representatives of those involved in the Garvaghy Road situation in order to encourage dialogue and an agreed local accommodation. Clearly, the cruel murder of Rosemary Nelson, the solicitor for the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition, on 15 March 1999, has aggravated an already tense and difficult confrontation and made the search for an accommodation all the more difficult.

Despite the brutal way in which Rosemary Nelson was slain, we must, however, continue to pursue such an accommodation if at all possible. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State have regularly discussed the situation on the Garvaghy Road and they have both recently reiterated their view that progress could only be made by a process of dialogue and accommodation. The Tussock and the Prime Minister Blair have also both been personally involved in encouraging this process.

Apart from Ministerial-level meetings, the continuing intimidation of the residents of the Garvaghy Road and associated violence, including attacks on the RUC by elements associated with the ongoing Orange protests, are regularly discussed between the Irish and British sides within the framework of the Anglo-Irish

Intergovernmental Conference. Such violence only hinders the search for a locally agreed accommodation.

The potential for further community division in the context of the situation in the Garvaghy Road area and in Portadown generally is all too evident as we approach the marching season again. The memory of Rosemary Nelson and her work for the people of the Garvaghy Road area and for people elsewhere in both communities would be best served by intensifying the search for a peaceful way forward in the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement. We should also remember her professional commitment to the rule of law. It is absolutely vital that the rule of law, including the determinations of the Parades Commission, prevail and be seen to prevail on the Garvaghy Road in the months ahead.

QUESTION 11

Lord Blease: To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law reform if, in view of the fact that the rivers, lakes and the waterways are a vital natural resource which contributes to the competitiveness of agriculture, aquaculture and commerce, the tourist industry and the general wealth, health and well-being of the community, he will make a statement on the current policy towards the management and natural development of these resources in the border counties and on the key issues requiring essential promotional work.

Minister O'Donoghue: The importance of the inland waterway to the communities in the border counties is fully recognised. There has been substantial investment in the waterways in recent times, and there are plans to enhance the management and further development of these waterways in the border counties and throughout the island.

In 1994, the linking of the Shannon Navigation system to the other well-developed navigation of the Erne, through the Shannon-Erne Waterway, gave a new impetus to Irish navigation and to tourism in the area. This project cost some £33 million. In 1996, navigation into Lough Allen was reopened, thus adding to the waterbody available for cruising.

In regard to the future of inland waterways, an Implementation Body is to be established under the Good Friday Agreement, to be known as Waterways Ireland, which will have the functions of management, maintenance, development and restoration of the inland navigable waterway system throughout the island, principally for recreation purposes.

Initially, when it comes into being, Waterways Ireland will be responsible for the Shannon-Erne Waterway and for carrying out studies and appraisals relating to the possible restoration and development of the Ulster canal; depending on the results of these studies it might then be assigned responsibility for restoration of the Ulster Canal.

In phase two, the Erne System, the Shannon Navigation, the Royal and Grand Canals, the Barrow Navigation and the Lower Bann Navigation will be transferred to Waterways Ireland as of 1 April 2000. Other waterways may be added to its remit in the future.

Waterways Ireland will also take over the functions of Shannon-Erne Waterway Promotions Ltd. At present, the marketing of the waterways is carried out by that company and by Dúchas, the Heritage Service, in cooperation with the Rivers Agency, Northern Ireland. One of the important functions of the new Body will be the promotion of the waterways for which it has responsibility, including marketing and development of their tourism and commercial potential.

Substantial investment has also been made in coarse angling in recent years. This will continue through the Tourism Angling Measure, and will be complemented by an enhanced investment programme on angling market research and overseas promotion.

While the prime economic value of the resource is the tourism angling product, there is an ecological imperative to conserve and protect the inland fisheries resource in its own right. Inland fisheries makes a qualitative contribution to local life, not least as a recreational activity. There is also the traditional socioeconomic contribution to our coastal and rural communities in terms of commercial fishing for such species as salmon and eels.

Both parts of the island share the objective to conserve, manage and develop the inland fisheries resource to the highest standards. There has been very considerable cooperation over the years on matters of mutual interest in inland fisheries, which has had a strong cross border dimension. The most notable examples of this are the Foyle Fisheries Commission, the Joint Committee for the Protection of the Eme, and cross border tourism angling and habitat development projects under the INTERREG programme. There is also longstanding cooperation on fish health and aquaculture matters. This was further underlined last year by the launch of a Cross Border Aquaculture Development Initiative.

These links and shared objectives have now taken a new form in the new Boyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, which is one of the North/South Implementation Bodies to be established under the Good Friday Agreement. In addition to the existing functions of the Boyle Fisheries Commission and the Commissioners of Irish Lights, the new Body will have responsibility for inland fisheries promotion and development, aquaculture and marine leisure promotion in Lough Boyle and Carlingford Lough.

All these developments underline the very positive opportunities which development of waterways, inland fisheries and aquaculture represent for economic activity in rural and coastal

communities North and South.

QUESTION 12

Mr Andrew Boylan TD (*Cavan-Monaghan*): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform how far advanced is the case for extra milk quota for the six Border counties of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Minister O'Donoghue: The case for additional milk quota for the border regions was discussed on a number of occasions between officials of the Department of Agriculture and Food, the United Kingdom's Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries and the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland. The matter arose out of attempts to improve the economics of the border regions in the wider context of the peace process. The matter was raised at Ministerial level with the UK and the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mr. Joe Walsh TD, has also met the Cross-Border Milk Quota Action Group. The success of such an initiative is dependent not only on the circumstances prevailing at the time of its presentation, but also, of course on the position taken by the United Kingdom authorities. Developments in the context of the CAP and of the milk quota regime generally are also important.

The Deputy will be aware that as part of the recent agreement on CAP reform under Agenda 2000 at the Council of Ministers, additional milk quota was agreed for both parts of the island. That is a welcome development.

QUESTION 13

Mr. Harry Barnes (*North East Derbyshire*): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will make a statement on progress towards the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons.

Minister O'Donoghue: Progress on the issue of decommissioning is absolutely necessary for the building of confidence and trust on all sides which will enable the benefits which will flow from the full implementation of the Agreement to be realised. The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning is vital to the successful resolution of the issue. The independence of the Commission is a vital element in the process of the permanent removal of paramilitary arms from the political equation in this island.

We welcome the nomination of Martin McGuinness by Sinn Féin, Billy Hutchinson by the UVF and Red Hand Commando and Pastor Kenny McClinton by the LVF to act as intermediaries with the Commission. This is undoubtedly a significant development and is to be welcomed as a sign of progress.

The Commission is in regular contact with the parties and the two Governments in this matter.

To date one decommissioning event has taken place. Last December a small quantity of arms was handed over to the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning by the LVF. This event successfully proved that the procedures which had been drawn up by the Commission for dealing with the practical issues

involved worked. We remain hopeful that further events such as that will follow and to this end the International Commission is continuing its work to achieve progress on this issue.

QUESTION 15

Ms Mary Coughlan TD (*Donegal South-West*): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if Ballyshamon, Clogher and Beleek will be included as part of the "flagship" project to reopen the Ulster canal and link Lough Neagh, the Erne and the Shannon and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Minister O'Donoghue: The reopening of the Ulster Canal would link Lough Neagh and Upper Lough Erne. A Feasibility Study completed last year concluded that the project is feasible and would cost £68.4 million sterling (1997 prices).

The question of extending navigation from Lower Lough Erne to Ballyshannon and the sea has not been investigated but preliminary consideration of the matter indicates that there would be major technical difficulties to be overcome and that the project would involve very substantial expenditure. It would not form part of the Ulster Canal project.

QUESTION 16

Senator Helen Keogh: To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, following the signing of the British-Irish Treaty on North-South implementation bodies at Dublin Castle on 8 March 1999, he can now provide a progress report on the establishment of those bodies.

Minister O'Donoghue: Legislation giving effect to the Agreement establishing the Implementation Bodies has been passed in both Houses of the Oireachtas and signed into law by the President. Similar legislation has been enacted in Westminster. The British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999, provides for the functions of the North/South Implementation Bodies, including those transferred from existing Departments and Agencies, to be undertaken immediately on the establishment of the Bodies.

The six Bodies to be established are Waterways Ireland; The Food Safety Promotion Board; The Trade and Business Development Body; The Special EU Programmes Body; An Foras Tangi / The Languages Body and the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission.

Under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement the Implementation Bodies will commence contemporaneously with the other institutional arrangements under the Agreement. The Government will ensure that all necessary measures for the effective operation of the Bodies will be in place on their establishment.

QUESTION 17

Senator Pascha1 Mooney: To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if the Government will actively support the involvement of the Cross Border Networks (North West Counties Border Network, Irish Central Border Area Network and East Border Network) in the planning and co-ordination of Operational Programmes after the year 2000; and if he can outline what structures might be put in place to achieve this objective.

Minister O'Donoghue: The INTERREG programme between the North and South, and the Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, their successors in the post-1999 period and the successors to the Leader and employment initiatives, will come under the remit of the Special EU Programmes Body being established under the Belfast Agreement. The special EU programmes body will have a major influence in setting the new shape of those initiatives post- 1999.

The Body will also adopt a new pro-active approach to the support and encouragement of an ever-increasing range of North-South co-operative actions along the lines set out in any successor to the present common chapter in the existing EU Community Support Framework in the South and the Single Programme in the North. The common chapter was first published as part of the respective national plans in 1993.

The Special EU Programmes Body will be a truly devolved body which will co-ordinate and complement the work of the three cross-Border networks. There will be the fullest consultation between the body and the cross-Border networks in the drawing up of the proposals for the new initiatives and for the integrated strategic plans which will be put in train.

The precise mechanisms for achieving the input of these networks remains to be elaborated in the coming months in the context of the establishment of the EU Special Programmes Body.

QUESTION 18

Mr Austin Currie, T.D. (Dublin West):To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will report progress on the recovery of the bodies of the disappeared, four years after Sinn Féin publicly promised its assistance in this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Minister O'Donoghue: In discussions with representatives of the Sinn Féin and others, my colleagues in Government and I have continued to raise the issue of the disappeared. Together with all those who are working towards the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, I hope that there will be a positive outcome and that this will happen sooner rather than later. I believe progress in this regard would rightly be viewed as a constructive development in keeping with the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement.

The fact that the Republican movement has recently requested anyone with information about the location of graves of missing people to contact a member of the movement or the families of the disappeared is a positive development. There are missing persons on both sides of the community and I again call on all those who have any information which might lead to the identification of their whereabouts to come forward at the earliest possible opportunity.