

British and Irish Governments. Joint Communiqué, 28 November 1995

Twin-track process to make parallel progress on decommissioning and all-party negotiations

1. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach met tonight. After intensive efforts by both governments, and with the benefit of consultations with parties in Northern Ireland, the two governments have agreed to launch a "twin-track" process to make progress in parallel on the decommissioning issue and on all-party negotiations.
2. Both governments reaffirmed their commitment to securing the early launch of all-party negotiations. By way of the twin tracks, the two governments have the firm aim of achieving this by the end of February 1996. It is the two governments' considered view that, with cooperation from all the relevant parties in both tracks, that objective should prove achievable. Both governments commit themselves to working, with others, to achieve it.
3. To this end, the two governments have agreed to invite the parties to intensive preparatory talks with a remit to reach widespread agreement on the basis, participation, structure, format and agenda to bring all parties together for substantive negotiations aimed at a political settlement based on consent. These talks will have an open agenda, allowing any party to raise any relevant matters. These matters would include how best the structure and format of all-party negotiations, involving in appropriate strands both governments and all the relevant Northern Ireland parties, directed to addressing in a comprehensive manner all the relevant relationships in an interlocking three-stranded process, can properly take account of democratic mandates and principles, including whether and how an elected body could play a part. These preparatory talks may also extend to all steps required to establish the necessary circumstances to bring the parties together at the negotiating table in accordance with paragraph 10 of the Downing Street declaration.
4. In managing the process of preparatory talks, each government will build on existing exchanges and bilateral contacts, treating each party on an equal basis; they will encourage other formats for meetings with the parties and among the parties, including meetings between the two governments together and one or more parties, with their agreement, where these might further the objective of the preparatory talks.
5. In parallel, the two governments have agreed to establish an international body to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue.

6. Recognising the widely expressed desire to see all arms removed from Irish politics, the two governments will ask the international body to report on the arrangements necessary for the removal from the political equation of arms silenced by the virtue of the welcome decisions taken last summer and autumn by those organisations that previously supported the use of arms for political purposes.

7. In particular, the two governments will ask the body to:

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

8. It will be for the international body to determine its own procedures. The two governments expect it to consult widely, to invite relevant parties to submit their analysis of matters relevant to the decommissioning issue and, in reaching its conclusions within its remit, to consider such evidence on its merits.

9. In establishing the body, the British and Irish governments reaffirm their willingness to continue to take responsive measures, advised by their respective security authorities, as the threat reduces.

10. The two governments have invited Senator George Mitchell to chair the body, and will invite two other eminent persons to serve as the other members of the body.

11. The two governments have asked the body to submit its report to the two governments by mid-January 1996. Neither government, nor any other party cooperating with the work of the body, is bound in advance to accept its recommendations, which will be advisory. The two governments will consider carefully any recommendations it makes and give them due weight on their merits.

12. To that end, and to review progress in preparatory talks for all-party negotiations, the two governments plan to meet again by mid-February 1996.