

Chronology

2000–2003

2000

January

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) leader David Trimble threatens to resign if the Irish Republican Army (IRA) fail to meet a February deadline on decommissioning.

February

Peter Mandelson, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, suspends the power-sharing Executive and restores direct rule from Westminster. The move follows reports from the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) that it had "received no information from the IRA as to when decommissioning will start" and fears that the Ulster Unionist Council would withdraw support from the Executive. The IRA withdraws from talks with the IICD.

March

David Trimble defeats a challenge for the leadership of the UUP from Martin Smyth (who wins 43 per cent of the vote). Trimble fails to stop a motion linking any resumption of the Executive to the retention of the title of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) for the Northern Ireland police force.

The Saville Inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday (30 January 1972) begins public hearings at the Guildhall in Derry.

May

British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish *Taoiseach* Bertie Ahern arrive in Northern Ireland for talks as part of a review of the *Belfast Agreement*.

Peter Mandelson offers to reduce the presence of British Army soldiers in Northern Ireland by an unspecified number if the IRA keeps to its promise on decommissioning. The next day, Ronnie Flanagan, Chief Constable of the RUC, discloses that five military installations are to close.

The IRA offers to allow inspection of arms dumps. The IICD appoints Cyril Ramaphosa (former Secretary-General of the African National Congress) and Martti Ahtisaari (former President of Finland) as inspectors.

Gerry Loughran is appointed as the head of the Civil Service in Northern Ireland, the first Catholic to serve in the post.

David Trimble states that it is his belief that the offer by the IRA to open its arms dumps to international inspection means that its 30-year war is over.

At a meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC), the policy-making body of the UUP, David Trimble narrowly wins a motion allowing him to re-enter the power-sharing Executive with Sinn Féin. The motion proposed to accept the IRA offer on disarmament as a basis for the return to Stormont.

The British government restores devolution to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the power-sharing Executive on 30 May.

June

The IRA issues a statement declaring that it has opened some of its arms dumps to be viewed by the independent weapons inspectors. The II CD confirms that the inspection has taken place.

July

It is announced that 2,000 soldiers are to be drafted into Northern Ireland to help police the loyalist marching season (only weeks after an announcement that levels of British soldiers were to reach their lowest levels since 1970). The Northern Ireland Parades Commission announces that it is banning the Orange Order from parading along the mainly nationalist Garvaghy Road, Portadown, County Armagh.

The last of the 428 paramilitary prisoners freed under the *Belfast Agreement* are released from the Maze Prison.

October

Peter Mandelson warns hardline Ulster Unionists that if devolution fails they could face joint rule by London and Dublin.

December

The Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) announce an "open-ended and all-encompassing cessation of hostilities", ending a loyalist feud that had been raging since August.

Sinn Féin begins a High Court case to challenge David Trimble's refusal to nominate their attendance at North/South Ministerial Council meetings.

2001

January

Peter Mandelson resigns from the British cabinet over his alleged role in a 'passports-for-favours' affair involving the millionaire Hinduja brothers. His departure comes in the midst of a further crisis over the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. John Reid is appointed to succeed Mandelson. He is the first Catholic to hold the post.

February

After a meeting with Tony Blair in London, David Trimble states that the *Belfast Agreement* is moving towards a review because of a lack of progress on disarmament. Seamus Mallon, deputy leader of the SDLP, says there is a real risk that the Agreement might collapse.

March

A Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA) car-bomb explodes outside the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Television Centre in London. One man is injured in the explosion.

Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern hold new talks in Belfast with the political parties, hoping for an interim agreement to keep the peace process alive. The IRA states that it is willing to meet with General John de Chastelain of the II CD for the first time since June 2000.

June

Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) make significant gains in the UK-wide Westminster General Election and the local government District Council elections on the same day.

Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern holds talk with representatives of the three main pro-Agreement parties in an attempt to break the political deadlock over decommissioning.

RUC officers have to protect children and parents entering the Catholic Holy Cross Girls' Primary School in north Belfast after local loyalist residents block the road to the school. The protests continue until the end of the school term and start again after the summer holidays.

July

David Trimble's threatened resignation as First Minister comes into effect at midnight on 30 June. He calls on Tony Blair to suspend the Northern Ireland Assembly and the other institutions established under the *Belfast Agreement*.

Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern begin a series of intensive political talks with the pro-Agreement parties in Weston Park, England but cannot produce an agreement. The British and Irish governments say they will put together a document containing a package of proposals for the parties on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

Serious riots take place during Orange Order marches past the nationalist Ardoyne and Short Strand areas of Belfast.

August

British Army officers defuse a RIRA car-bomb left in the main car park at Belfast International Airport on 1 August. Two days later a RIRA bomb goes off near Ealing Broadway railway station in London, slightly injuring seven people.

The British and Irish governments publish their Implementation Plan for the *Belfast Agreement* on 1 August. The document (which is published online at www.c-r.org/accord) addresses the remaining issues of policing, normalization, stability of the institutions, and decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. The political parties are given until 6 August to give their response to the proposals.

A statement is issued by General John de Chastelain on 6 August in which he announces that an IRA representative has proposed a method for putting weapons completely and verifiably beyond use.

UUP Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of Parliament (MPs) meet for two hours on 7 August to discuss the British and Irish government's Implementation Plan and the statement by the IICD. Following the meeting the UUP reject both the Implementation Plan and the latest decommissioning proposals by the IRA. The SDLP responds positively to the Implementation Plan.

The IRA issues a statement on 9 August about its meetings with the IICD. David Trimble, leader of the UUP, says the statement does not go far enough and his party wants to see a beginning to actual decommissioning. The UUP, Sinn Féin and SDLP hold separate meetings with John Reid, at Hillsborough Castle, County Down. The UUP argues for a suspension of the institutions of devolved government, whereas Sinn Féin favours fresh elections to the Assembly.

John Reid suspends the Northern Ireland Assembly from midnight on 10 August for a period of 24 hours. The effect of the suspension is to allow another period of six weeks for the political parties to come to an agreement and re-elect the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Three Irish men are arrested at Bogotá Airport in Colombia on 13 August, for travelling on falsedocuments. They include an alleged Sinn Féin representative living in Cuba, a member of the Sinn Féin *Ard Comhairle* (national executive), and an election worker for Sinn Féin in Armagh. There is speculation that the three men, who had reportedly been in an area of Colombia under the control of left-wing guerrillas, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), were members of the Provisional IRA and that they had been helping to train the guerrillas.

On 14 August, the IRA announces that it has withdrawn its plan on how to put its weapons beyond use, citing UUP rejection of the plan and the suspension of the Assembly and institutions as their reason.

The 'Patten Report - Updated Implementation Plan 2001' containing revised proposals for the policing service is published on 17 August. The DUP reject the plan stating that the measures contained go far beyond the original Patten Report. Of the parties already shown copies, Sinn Féin rejects the document for not going far enough, and the UUP states that it will not consider the issue of policing without IRA decommissioning. The Irish government calls on the SDLP and Sinn Féin to support the Implementation Plan and to nominate representatives to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

The SDLP announces that it will nominate representatives to the proposed 19-member Policing Board to oversee the new Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The DUP lets the deadline to respond pass, while the UUP announces that it requires more time to respond to the revised proposals.

September

John Reid suspends the Northern Ireland Assembly at midnight on 21 September for 24 hours. The suspension allows another period of six weeks (until 3 November) in which the political parties have an opportunity to come to agreement and elect a First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

David Trimble says that his party will table a motion in the Northern Ireland Assembly to exclude Sinn Féin ministers from the Executive. Trimble also announces that if the motion fails the UUP will withdraw its ministers from the Executive.

October

The Northern Ireland Assembly debates a UUP motion, and later a similar DUP motion, to exclude Sinn Féin ministers from the Executive. The motions are supported by unionist members of the Assembly but not by Sinn Féin or the SDLP. Due to a lack of cross-community

support the two motions fail. Following the debates the UUP announces that its three ministers are withdrawing from the Executive.

John Reid announces that he is "specifying" the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), and the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), meaning that the British government considers their ceasefires to be at an end.

David Trimble and Gerry Adams hold a meeting at Stormont to discuss the possible decommissioning of IRA weapons and what political steps would be likely to follow. They fail to resolve outstanding issues.

The three UUP ministers and the two DUP ministers formally resign from the Northern Ireland Executive on 18 October.

The IRA issues a statement on 23 October announcing that the organization has begun to decommission its weapons. David Trimble meets with General John de Chastelain to discuss the act of decommissioning by the IRA. He announces that he will be recommending to the UUP executive that the UUP ministers retake their seats on the Executive. The DUP and some members of the UUP claim the move by the IRA is a "one-off gesture" or a "stunt".

November

The Northern Ireland Assembly meets on 2 November to elect a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister. David Trimble stands for re-election to the post of First Minister. The SDLP nominates Mark Durkan (soon to succeed John Hume as SDLP leader) as Deputy First Minister, as Seamus Mallon no longer wishes to be considered for the position. The DUP opposes the election of Trimble as First Minister and obtains enough unionist support to prevent his election by one vote. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) wins an earlier motion to reduce the 30 days notice required to change the community nomination of MLAs, allowing it to change its two MLAs from being designated 'other' to being one 'unionist' and one 'nationalist'. Despite this move Trimble fails to be elected. The UUP manages to strengthen the support of some of its waverers but two assembly members are unwilling to back the leadership and so the vote is lost on the floor of the Assembly. The pressure now comes on the Alliance party to follow the procedure adopted by the NIWC to enable a new vote to take place. After some internal debate the Alliance agrees and a successful vote takes place. On 6 November, Trimble and Durkan are finally elected. Following the vote there are scuffles between pro- and anti-Agreement members in the hall outside the Assembly chamber where David Trimble and Mark Durkan give a press briefing. The DUP begins a

court challenge to the elections on the grounds that the final vote took place after the time limit laid down by the Northern Ireland Act.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) comes into being, replacing the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). The new recruits are to be selected in equal proportions from the Catholic and Protestant communities. The powers of the new Northern Ireland Policing Board take effect. The UUP, DUP and SDLP take their seats on the Board, but Sinn Féin does not.

2002

January

Thousands join rallies on 18 January organized by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in protest against paramilitary activity. They are sparked by the murder of 20 year old Catholic postman Daniel McColligan by the UDA six days before.

The Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) issue a statement calling for an end to trouble in north Belfast. Nationalist politicians are very sceptical about the impact of the statement but say they are willing to meet with loyalist paramilitaries. The Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) issues a statement claiming that attacks on nationalists are putting an "impossible" strain on the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) ceasefire.

March

The Northern Ireland Assembly debates a motion proposing the expulsion of Sinn Féin from the Executive for a period of one year. The motion is tabled by the DUP and other anti-Agreement unionist parties. David Trimble describes the timing of the motion as a "stunt". Those requesting the debate specifically ask for it to be held before 9 March - the date of the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) annual general meeting. Most pro-Agreement MLAs do not attend the debate and the motion is defeated.

Trimble tells the House of Commons that he opposes any amnesty for paramilitary fugitives (also called "on the runs"). He says it would represent the "last straw" for many unionist supporters of the Agreement.

April

The PSNI has its first passing-out parade. Democratic Unionists complain after the head of the Irish Republic's police force, Pat Byrne, is invited to speak.

The IRA puts a second tranche of its arsenal "beyond use". General de Chastelain (IIICD) describes the event as "substantial".

May

Northern Ireland Secretary of State John Reid says that a ceasefire is not enough from the IRA: there also needs to be a "sense that the war is over", and an end to paramilitary activity has to accompany the general commitment to peace.

September

Following a meeting with UUP hardliners, David Trimble says his party will withdraw from the power-sharing Executive on 18 January if republicans do not demonstrate they have left violence behind for good. SDLP leader Mark Durkan says the peace process is now in crisis.

October

Discoveries during a PSNI raid on Sinn Féin offices at Stormont result in allegations of a republican spying ring. David Trimble announces he will withdraw his ministers from the executive unless the government proposes the expulsion of Sinn Féin. A DUP motion to exclude Sinn Féin from the Executive is defeated and their ministers resign on 12 October.

On 14 October, the Secretary of State suspends the institutions leading to a return of direct rule by London ministers from midnight.

Leading Belfast republican Martin Meehan says the IRA's campaign is at an end, but Gerry Adams does not endorse the statement, responding: "Certainly for many republicans the war is over and those who see it like that will say so. But what I have to deal with is the management of a conflict resolution process".

Tony Blair speaks in Belfast on 16 October calling for "acts of completion".

In a British cabinet reshuffle, Paul Murphy takes over from John Reid as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 24 October.

2003

January

An IRA statement says the peace process is under threat from "the British military establishment, its intelligence agencies and from the loyalist murder gangs". David Trimble says the statement is the "work of people living in an unreal world".

A number of attacks in loyalist areas of Belfast indicate a growing internal feud between the UDA and its members in the lower Shankill area of Belfast.

February

Following the murder of a UDA commander by members of the UDA company in the Lower Shankill, the UDA threatens any members who do not leave that company immediately. The majority move to join other companies and some of the leaders are forced to flee overnight to Scotland. These developments are taken to mean an end to the loyalist feud and the UDA announces a ceasefire for 12 months.

The 'One Small Step' campaign is launched on 27 February, calling on groups and individuals to show their commitment to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.

March

With growing expectations that a statement is about to be agreed which will allow the institutions to be reinstated, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern host talks at Hillsborough with all the pro-Agreement parties. With no breakthrough, the elections are postponed from 1 May until 29 May to allow more time for any proposals to gain the support of the UUP and for the Institutions to begin operating again.

Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams says he can foresee a situation where his party would join the Policing Board, and the party later agrees to hold a special conference should the question of joining the policing board emerge.

April

The IRA issues a confidential statement on 10 April, but the two governments feel it is neither sufficiently clear nor adequate for David Trimble to gain the support of his party. The British and Irish governments postpone the publication of a blueprint to complete implementation of the *Belfast Agreement*. The IRA produces a further statement of clarification on 13 April which is not accepted by the Ulster Unionists.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, without support from the *Taoiseach*, postpones elections indefinitely and says the priority now is to work for equality and the protection of human rights.

May

On 6 May the IRA makes public the previously unpublished statement of 13 April. The document states that the IRA poses no threat to unionists or the peace process and is committed to making conflict a thing of the past.