**Government Response to Opposition Views on the Proposal to Establish a Constitutional Convention**

**Introduction**

The Government published its proposals for the establishment of a Constitutional Convention on February 28th, following an initial consultation with Opposition representatives. It has since received and reviewed observations on those proposals.

The main issues raised and the Government’s response are set out below.

The Government now proposes to proceed with the establishment of a Constitutional Convention and to propose the necessary resolutions in the Oireachtas as soon as is possible in the current term.

**Key Issues Raised and Government Response**

Structure and Operation of the Convention

This will be a matter for the Convention itself to determine.

The Government has put arrangements in train to provide a secretariat, accommodation and a budget (€300,000 in 2012) to support the Convention.

While the secretariat will be relatively small, the issue of whether young unemployed people could be given an opportunity to work on the Convention (eg via the Job Bridge programme) will be considered.

It is anticipated that the members will be able to draw on secretarial support, training/education and expert advice as required.

Travel and subsistence expenses of citizen members will be reimbursed.

Provision will also be made by the secretariat for the establishment of a website with the capacity to widely disseminate information, provide interactivity with citizens at home and abroad and broadcast proceedings online as required.

Insufficient Timeframe

Concerns have been expressed that the Convention will have insufficient time to complete its work.

The Government’s view is that the proposed work programme and timeframe are appropriate.

It will of course review this in the light of experience, including in consultation with Opposition representatives.

Chairperson

The Government will seek consensus on the nomination of a Chairperson, in the context of the proposed resolution of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Additional Topics for Consideration

The Government remains of the view that the topics for discussion should be as outlined in the paper published on February 28th.

It would, however, be prepared to consider whether other topics could be considered at a later date, in the light of experience. The Taoiseach will consult with Opposition representatives and the Chair on the Convention at the appropriate time.

The Role (including Membership and Representation) of Interest Groups or Other Specified Groups

A number of views were expressed that interest groups or specific sections of society should be represented at the Convention. Examples included vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalised groups, children, people from Northern Ireland (including especially Northern unionists), the diaspora and Ireland’s newest citizens.

The Government is firmly of the view that the Convention should be composed of ordinary citizens and elected representatives, as set out in the paper published on February 28th.

It is not practical to accommodate as members, in a fair and representative manner, all of the groups or sections of society that have been proposed.

However, it is anticipated that interest groups would be able to interact with the Convention, including by making submissions, and that the Chair and Members would be anxious to hear from a representative spectrum of opinion in carrying out their work.

There is specific provision for representation, on an inclusive basis, from Northern Ireland. It is also proposed that there would be active engagement with the diaspora.

The Use of the Electoral Register and/or Polling Company

The approach proposed is the fairest and most effective way of selecting a representative group of 66 citizens to serve on the Convention.

The selection process will be overseen by the independent Chair.

Public Participation in Setting Future Agendas

The process of establishment of the Convention and its actual operation are matters of public debate and an important innovation in public life.

On the assumption that the Convention successfully carries out the work programme assigned to it by the Oireachtas, it seems likely that the question of its future agenda will be the subject of much further public debate.

Commitment to Act on Recommendations

The Government will commit to giving a public response, through the Oireachtas, to each recommendation from the Convention within four months. It will arrange for a debate in the Oireachtas on that response in each case.

In the event the Government accepts a recommendation that the Constitution be amended, the Government’s public response will include a timeframe for the holding of a referendum.

Reference to the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement

The Government agrees that the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement are fundamental to the changed relationships on the island of Ireland and form the cornerstone for the future development of those relationships, especially with Northern Ireland unionists.

They should therefore be referred to in appropriate fashion in the establishing resolution.

7 June, 2012.