



**Ministerial Meeting of the Sectoral Group on the Misuse of Drugs
7 December 2006**

Communiqué

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Paul Goggins, M.P. hosted a Ministerial Meeting of the British-Irish Council on the Misuse of Drugs in the Culloden Hotel in Belfast today. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Noel Ahern T.D., Minister of State with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy in the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The meeting focussed on the challenges presented by cocaine use. This was the first time that the Ministerial meeting focussed in detail on a specific subject to facilitate detailed discussions and exchange of experiences and best practices in regard to that subject. Ministers found that similar issues arose in relation to cocaine in each administration but that the problem was at various stages of development in the different jurisdictions. They agreed that cocaine is a significant issue and requires a high priority in administrations to tackle supply and demand factors and that there was much they could learn from each others' experiences. The Ministers resolved to continue to cooperate and exchange experiences, with particular emphasis on initiatives that have led to successful outcomes and that may lend themselves to broader application in other administrations.

The British-Irish Council was established under the Strand Three Provisions of the Good Friday Agreement as a forum for its Members to exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of relevant member administrations. Ireland is the lead administration within the Council on the issue of Misuse of Drugs.

The Irish Government was represented by Minister of State with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy, Mr. Noel Ahern T.D., who chaired the meeting. The British Government was represented by

Mr. Vernon Coaker M.P., Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Home Office and Mr. Paul Goggins M.P., Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who hosted the meeting. Guernsey was represented by Mr. Mike Torode, Minister for the Home Department and Jersey by Ms. Celia Scott-Warren, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services. Ms. Patricia Scotland, Head of the Safer Communities Division represented the Scottish Executive and the Isle of Man was represented by Ms. Margaret O'Reilly, Drug and Alcohol Co-ordinator. A full list of delegation members is attached.

Ministers reviewed the successful work which the Council has taken forward in each of these important areas:

- ◆ Wales hosted a meeting in January 2006 which focused on the issue of commissioning drugs treatment services;
- ◆ Guernsey hosted a meeting on the topic of confiscation of drugs-related criminal assets in June;
- ◆ In September, Ireland hosted a meeting on rehabilitation of problem drug users;
- ◆ In October, Jersey hosted a meeting focusing on an evaluation study comparing the experiences of those on methadone with those on subutex as substitutes for heroin; and
- ◆ Northern Ireland hosted a meeting in November on the challenges presented by cocaine use.

Ministers agreed that these meetings had provided a very useful forum for sharing, in a focussed and practical manner, the detailed expertise and knowledge, which is held across the British-Irish Council region. It was also noted that, in addition to exploring specific themes in depth, each meeting had facilitated the exchange of information on general developments and initiatives in relation to the misuse of drugs.

Ministers agreed that work over the coming year would focus on the following areas :

- ◆ drugs strategy development;
- ◆ homelessness and drug use,
- ◆ enhanced focus on information provision in drug and alcohol strategies; and
- ◆ integrated substance misuse assessment methods.

These meetings will also seek to strengthen and consolidate the ongoing co-operation and the exchange of information, experience and best practice between Members.

It was agreed that Ministers would meet again in late 2007.

British-Irish Council (Misuse of Drugs Sectoral Group)

7 December 2006

List of Delegates

Irish Government

Minister of State with responsibility for the

National Drugs Strategy

Principal Officer,

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Assistant Principal Officer,

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Administrative Officer,

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Mr. Noel Ahern TD

Mr. Michael Conroy

Mr. Eddie Arthurs

Ms. Fidelma Lyons

British Government

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Home Office

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Head of International Section, Crime & Drugs Legislation & Enforcement

Northern Ireland Regional Alcohol and Drugs Strategy Co-ordinator

Northern Ireland Alcohol and Drugs Policy Branch

Mr. Vernon Coaker MP

Mr. Paul Goggins MP

Mr. Gabriel Denvir

Mr. Rob Phipps

Ms Norma Downey

Scottish Executive

Head of the Safer Communities Division

Safer Communities Division

Ms. Patricia Scotland

Ms. Dawn Abell

Guernsey

Minister for the Home Department of the States of Guernsey

Guernsey Drug Strategy Co-ordinator

Mr. Mike Torode

Ms. Andrea Nightingale

Jersey

Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services of the States of Jersey

Department of Health and Social Services

Ms. Celia Scott-Warren

Mr. Michael Gafoor

Government of the Isle of Man

Drug and Alcohol Co-ordinator

Ms. Margaret O'Reilly