It was on 10 March 1975 that the PAC, having reviewed the Truce situation, complained that after four weeks of genuine and sustained suspension of hostilities by Oglaigh na hÉireann, the response of the British Government ‘is considered unsatisfactory by the Army Council’. It formally told HMG that the duration of the Truce depended on the progress made towards securing a permanent peace. Negotiations on the three basic demands of the Republican Movement for a permanent peace ‘have not made any worthwhile progress. We therefore demand the initiation of such talks on a realistic basis.’ Any matters of a Truce supervisory nature must be handled by a separate team of negotiators. Point 1 of the Truce agreement was not being honoured by Crown Forces. The arrest of three Republicans in County Armagh was a gross violation of the Truce: ‘We shall gauge the sincerity and integrity of HMG in observing the Truce by the immediate release of the three men’, the PAC warned the British. The action of the RUC over the previous few weeks had been a violation of Point 3 of the Truce agreement: ‘If this action continues Oglaigh na hÉireann will adopt suitable measures to bring to an end all forms of harassment and provocation by the RUC.’ A public statement to this effect would be issued, informing the people of Britain and Ireland of the new situation, stated the PAC. In their reply the British emphasised that HMG’s goodwill was shown by the continuing discussions and the operation of the Incident Centres. The release at Christmas of 160 internees out of a total of 570 was considered by the British to be ‘significant’. The ball was stated to be in the RM’s court regarding discussions on political matters. As to the PAC complaints on the arrest of Republicans, ‘the Brits stated that they were “unable to interfere in the processes of law”’. They also reassured the PAC that no provocation would be given by the security forces; they conceded that the RUC had ‘pushed matters initially but this had levelled off’.

For the 16 March meeting, the Republican representatives were instructed by the PAC to formally complain that the Armagh arrests were a breach of Point 1 of the Truce agreement. This was a ‘fundamental point and...
the breaches must be resolved’. The Volunteers had ‘not flaunted themselves, they have obeyed instructions and kept a low profile’. The McCann Volunteer case in Armagh, for example, was acted on immediately (within half an hour) through an Incident Centre, yet he was charged and remanded in custody. The PAC was perplexed at how one could explain British Army and RUC co-operation in another Volunteer arrest (that of McClelland, also in Armagh) where the British Army knew of the proposed arrest half an hour beforehand. The IRA had been told by ‘MO’ that the British Army was not willing to escort the RUC to break the terms of the Truce. And the HMG representatives had told their RM counterpoints, at the 5 March meeting, that: ‘House searches, screening and photographing [were] discontinued from this date’, yet the arrest of McCann in the Volunteer’s house on 8 March violated this. These arrests contradicted the ‘RM general amnesty point. If men are going into prison then the position is slipping backward instead of forward.’ And there was concern over a British Army shooting on the Lower Falls: ‘After seven weeks of Truce the agreement is still being nailed down’, complained the PAC. The points of contradiction were: ‘HMG stands by point one yet arrests take place’ and ‘Rees is in control of the RUC yet they make incursions into designated areas’. The IRA, however, were not without blame, as they instructed their representatives to admit to the British that if violent incidents in London were raised, they were to state ‘RM is responsible’. The RM representatives were also to admit involvement in an incident at Whitecross.3

At the formal HMG–IRA meeting of 16 March, the British tried to defuse the tension and stated that: ‘Despite problems progress has been achieved. The patience in negotiation and the discipline of RM are acknowledged by HMG.’ They wished to continue with the meetings and build up trust: ‘We must get through our difficulties.’ They insisted progress had been made in the practical arrangements. Some difficult problems were resolved. Their aim was to maintain the Truce and make steady progress towards a genuine and sustained cessation of violence. The British noted the anxiety expressed by the RM regarding the arrests of Volunteers in Armagh and understood the concern shown. But they could not interfere in the processes of law once law-breakers were arrested. The British attitude was reflected in Points 1 and 4 of the Truce agreement. As for the Belfast shooting incident, the HMG representatives emphasised that British investigations were not complete. The two people injured were not well enough yet to be interviewed. The soldiers involved had already been interviewed. Both the British military and the RUC were proceeding with separate inquiries. On the question of arrests the British pointed that in the case of one of those held – McCann – a report had been made to Lurgan RUC Barracks. The latest information was that plain-clothes men had arrived at a hotel; a fracas developed and British Army assistance arrived at 3:25 p.m. in the form of two sections totalling 14 men. McCann attempted to escape and was arrested. An HMG–RM