

Mr. Tony Blair
Prime Minister
10 Downing St.
London

3rd March 2000

Dear Mr Blair

We are writing to express our concern about the current process. It appears to lack direction and strategic management, is excluding key constituencies and is creating a dangerous political vacuum, which only serves to strengthen those who are opposed to the Good Friday Agreement (both political and paramilitary opponents).

This is a process which needs to be managed by the two governments, who together, carry primary responsibility for the implementation of the Agreement. They also need to recognise that they are participants and cannot always play 'honest broker'. It is essential that the two governments rebuild their bridges and reassert an inclusive and managed framework without which there is little chance of success.

We are also concerned that, in the context of the asymmetric implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, it is very unhelpful that 22nd May 2000 be viewed as the 'final' deadline. It is our view that the political environment that might have allowed for realistic progress on the issue of decommissioning has been almost entirely absent since Good Friday 1998. That, along with the missed 'deadline' of 31st October 1998 [Strand 2, paragraph 8] (which shifted from deadline to 'target date' as it became clear it would not be met) makes progress by 22nd May 2000 very unlikely.

That being the case, it is important that the governments highlight that 22nd May was a target date, with which progress could only be expected in its proper context. It is also important that this message comes into the public consciousness as soon as possible in order to avoid the appearance of being another eleventh hour panicked decision.

We look forward to participating in the resolution of the current difficulties, aware of the fact that politics is rarely without difficulties, and that commitment to address them is what marks successful administrations from moribund ones.

Yours sincerely

Monica McWilliams