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THE PRIME MINISTER

**DRAFT REPLY TO THE TAOISEACH
(AS AT 0900, 12 NOVEMBER)**

Thank you for your letter of 11 November.

I am of course very concerned at the suggestions that there is some kind of an emerging rift between our two Governments.

You and I have worked very closely together. I believe that our habit of plain speaking, and the trust we have developed, have been vital to cooperation between the British and Irish Governments on what is for both of us an enormously delicate and important area of policy.

Only two weeks ago, in Brussels, we reached full agreement privately and in our Joint Statement on the way ahead. I said at the time that the two Governments had never been closer. I meant it. I have since done exactly what I said I would do. So I am particularly keen to clear up straight away any possible misunderstandings. For either of us to go back on our joint position (described to me by more than one leading Northern Irish politician as the only

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hopeful development in a very black period) would cause deep disappointment to people in Northern Ireland and much more widely.

We agreed in Brussels to aim at two, complementary objectives - a complete cessation of violence and intensified efforts to find a basis for new talks. We did not suggest that one should precede or be conditional upon the other (nor have I since made any such suggestion). Both will be needed for a lasting settlement, and we should do all we can to take opportunities for progress in either dimension. Though I see them as ultimately inseparable, let me take each in turn.

You refer to the upsurge in support for peace and to the untenability of ignoring what is widely felt to be the best opportunity for many years to bring about lasting peace. I agree. These are points we made in the Joint Statement, and points which I have continued to emphasise in public and in my consultations. I have said repeatedly that we are looking for a permanent end to violence. I may well do so again in a high profile speech next week. Over and over again, I have repeated the offer in the Joint Statement that new doors could open if and when a renunciation of violence is sufficiently demonstrated. I have stressed that we would respond imaginatively to this new situation. I have urged Northern Ireland's political leaders to take this opportunity. I have said that I am myself prepared to take risks to achieve this.

What I am cannot do (and I know you would not ask me to do) is to endorse any course which, instead of ending violence, could increase it; or which, in my judgement, would be likely to drive further away the prospect of a political settlement. That is why we agreed - and stated - that we could not proceed on the basis of the Hume\Adams dialogue. As you and I recognised,

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any deal negotiated in that way is more or less certain to be unacceptable to the majority community in Northern Ireland, and could trigger a violent backlash of even greater severity than recent, appalling events. It would be impossible to convince people that such a deal did not embody a victory for the pursuit of violence by PIRA, and the granting by us of political concessions in return for its cessation. This is not to call in question the sincerity or the courage of John Hume. Nor is it a matter of protecting my "freedom of manoeuvre". I don't understand your reference to this. In saying that our Governments could not adopt or endorse Hume\Adams, we were reflecting what is politically possible in Northern Ireland - and only that.

I have also, as you know, yet to have my talk with Archbishop Dames.
You say that your officials have reported that we cannot proceed any further with your proposed initiative, and that you have explained to me on a number of occasions that the approach you have put to us will sooner or later become a matter of public debate. I think this is a misunderstanding. I can recall no occasion on which there has been talk of this becoming a matter of public debate. Quite the reverse. You have been at pains to discuss this with us only very privately and normally without others present. I have had a full account of the talks on 10 November. My officials were rightly cautious about any course which might lead us again into the very difficult situation created (for both you and us) by the Hume\Adams dialogue. They reflected our concern that anything which appeared to stem from Hume\Adams would be fatally undermined by the deep anxieties aroused by Hume\Adams - anxiety that a deal is being negotiated which would reward years of terrorism. We would now have to find a way of separating any initiative of our own clearly from Hume\Adams, in its style and character, so that it could not be tarred with the same brush. But they certainly did not want to reject any viable opportunity for peace, or for testing out PIRA's willingness to renounce violence without

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seeking unacceptable conditions. These are problems which, as you will recognise, we must both address in looking at your latest proposals. Having now had these proposals explained to us, we are considering them urgently, and will respond as soon as we can. It will help us if we can do this without talk of deadlines or Press speculation, and certainly without (to speak privately and frankly in view of our friendship) some of the rather menacing language which one of your officials has used. I stress that for us, as for you, there can be no higher objective than taking any genuine opportunity for peace. You have only to think how enormously we would benefit from this in every way.

I have also, as you know, yet to have my talk with Archbishop Eames. But he has been in touch with me; and now that I have your paper, I am arranging for him to come to see me as soon as possible. I shall then be in touch with you again.

Turning now to the talks process, I have been intensely active since our meeting, as I promised; but I need your help and cooperation, just as I need the cooperation of all the other participants. I have seen the leaders of all four constitutional parties. My talks with them - even my meeting with the DUP - have given grounds for encouragement. I have seen clear evidence that the shock of recent events, pressure from both communities, and the beneficial effect of the Joint Statement are acting on them. Michael Ancram has meanwhile completed his second round of exploratory meetings. He has found some useful convergence between the Parties on substantive issues, but also a sense that the Governments must set the framework for the next steps.

A key to further progress is the work which British and Irish officials have been undertaking through the Liaison Group. As you will know, British

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officials handed over an initial draft of a possible Joint Framework Document on 24 September. The Liaison Group has met three times since then, and has had discussions based on this draft. But we still await the Irish side's response, and it is this - not any tardiness on our side - which is holding up further progress. It is now needed urgently because the framework document ought to address the possible substantive framework for further political progress, and also the key set of issues on constitutional balance. It has the potential to generate a public shape for further talks which the Unionists would find hard to resist. It could also provide material to work within the Joint Declaration context, if it turns out that the elements of that approach need to be repackaged in order to have the best chance of success.

I was concerned to hear, from a telephone call on 11 November, that your response to the draft document was being withheld, although it was now ready. I cannot reconcile this with the spirit of our meeting a fortnight ago or with the Joint Statement. I cannot believe that you really wish to obstruct progress in this way; I would urge you to send your response as soon as possible, so that we can keep up the highest degree of momentum in our drive for a political settlement. The statements which you and Dick Spring have made recently looking to the possibility of Constitutional change, and the backing which you gave the talks process and the Joint Statement, have done as much as anything to give us new momentum. I have recognised this publicly, and will continue to give credit and strong support, as you rightly deserve.

Albert, let us give no encouragement to those who seek to find daylight between the two Governments. I know that, as you say in your letter, you have had to put up with domestic political criticism. I sympathise, because I have had to do the same. We must not be deflected by this. The best hope for

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peace for Northern Ireland lies in our two Governments working together. It would be tragic if we could not keep up the momentum generated by the Joint Statement. I am sure that we can make further progress by the time of our meeting next month. Do, please, keep in close touch between now and then.

Mr Albert Reynolds TD
An Taoiseach

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