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FROM: DAVID WATKINS
CENT SEC
11 JUNE 1996

cc PS/Secretary of State(L+B) -B
PS/Sir John Wheeler(L,B+DFP) -B
PS/Michael Ancram(L,B+DENI) -B
PS/Malcolm Moss(L,DOE+DHSS) -B
PS/Baroness Denton(L,DED+DANI) -B
PS/PUS(L+B) -B
PS/Sir David Fell -B
Mr Thomas(L+B) -B
Mr Bell -B
Mr Legge -B
Mr Leach -B
Mr Steele -B
Mr Hill -B
Mr Beeton -B
Mr Maccabe -B
Mr Lavery -B
Mr Perry -B
Mr Stephens -B
Miss Harrison -B
Ms Checksfield -B
Ms Mapstone -B
Mr Whysall -B
Mr Lamont, RID -B
HMA Dublin -B
Mrs McNally

PS/Secretary of State(L+B) -B

MEETING WITH ALLIANCE PARTY, 8.15PM, 11 JUNE

John Alderdice led a delegation consisting of Sir Oliver Napier, Steve McBride and Seamus Close, at their request, to a meeting with the Secretary of State, Michael Ancram, Sir David Fell, David Lavery, Martin Howard and myself at 8.15pm on Tuesday 11 June.

2. After a brief description from the Secretary of State of the current situation, Alderdice recalled several meetings his party had had during the day and emphasised the parlous state of the talks. He argued that the current disagreement had nothing to do with Mitchell, only a little about rules of procedure, but actually about Unionist in-fighting. Ironically the net effect of the Unionist action was to make it virtually obligatory that Mitchell chair the

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plenary. Alderdice continued that his party had come on the basis of the 6 June invitation. Unless parties were unanimous on some other basis, those rules would have to run. As of now the process was very close to the edge.

3. Alderdice continued that the key concern of the Alliance was that the 1991 rules were not robust enough to protect the Chairman over two weeks of discussion because McCartney in particular would expose the Loyalists to severe questioning on the six principles and so unanimity could not be reached. The Alliance would propose taking the 1991 rules and amending them to some extent. This would best be done by remitting amendment to Mitchell himself, asking his view of what he needs to protect his position.

4. The Secretary of State said that he believed that it was now possible to split the UUP from the other Unionists, in which case Trimble needed some defence against them. We had to judge carefully the acceptable break-point for the UUP.

5. Alderdice returned to his argument about the great capacity of Paisley and McCartney to cause trouble, the more so if they continued inside the process. This again underlined the need for procedural rules to be robust enough to enable the Chairman to deal with Paisley and McCartney. 6 June gave the Chairman discretion, whereas the 1991 rules put the Chairman in the role of mere facilitator - indeed the Unionists' aim was to reduce Mitchell to and position of Sir Ninian Stephen. If Paisley and McCartney stayed on 1991 rules, then the process was virtually over. Michael Ancram argued that the key was to keep Trimble on side. To this Alderdice replied that Trimble needed us more than the process needed him. In fact Trimble would have to climb down in order to accept Mitchell as Chairman (as he had to) and the sooner we helped him climb down the better.

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6. Fell argued that the key remained the UUP/SDLP axis. He asked whether we ought to give Trimble the fig leaf of a Committee plus the 1991 rules amended for consensus? Alderdice confirmed this provided the consensus rules were written by Mitchell. The alternative of a round of consultations of the parties would be fruitless. He continued to assert that interim rules in effect written by Mitchell should be the basis for the start of the plenary. Until agreement was reached on the rules with default to 6 June, the 1991 rules as amended by Mitchell, to protect his position, should apply. To the Secretary of State's argument that the problem with that was that Trimble's position was precisely that the 6 June rules gave too much discretion to the Chairman, Alderdice retorted that Sir Patrick was being too reasonable: Trimble needed help out of the hole he had dug for himself. Fell asked whether it would not be better to use the 1991 rules subject only to Ground Rules provision on consensus rather than unanimity. Alderdice did not dissent: both Governments should go to Mitchell tonight seeking his agreement to amend the rules, and should propose something akin to this morning's proposal although with Mitchell amending the rules as he saw fit. Fell pointed out that the Alliance idea would be needed only if Paisley and McCartney decided to stay in. Alderdice did not dissent, but stressed that without the position put forward by the Alliance the whole process would fold. Fell then summarised the Alliance position as accepting that unanimity would be alright provided Paisley and McCartney had walked out, but not otherwise.

7. Alderdice then changed the subject to the Forum. He argued that, if we had not mapped an agreed way forward on the Talks process tonight, then the Forum should not meet this week. If it did Paisley would lead all the Unionists in the Forum on Friday into expressions of no confidence in Mitchell and other criticisms of the Talks process. We therefore needed decisions on deferral of the Forum tonight, announcing that we would not hold the first meeting until next week. That would then put Paisley on notice that he could not use a meeting of the Forum this week to create trouble.

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8. At that point, and with thanks for Alliance for their clarity. The meeting ended at 8.35pm.

(Signed)

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