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THE PRIME MINISTER
IN CONFIDENCE

8 July 1996

When we met on 2 July, I said I would consider what you had said, together with the letter from Mr. Adams of 26 June which you gave me.

The Government's position, shared by the Irish Government, has often been set out in public. There should be no doubt about it.

We have put in place comprehensive and inclusive negotiations which have been under way in Belfast since 10 June. Those negotiations are to secure an overall political settlement and will address all the issues relevant to that. As you know, any participant can raise any issue. No outcome is pre-determined or excluded in advance, or limited by anything other than the need for agreement. Both Governments have made clear, in the Ground Rules and elsewhere, their commitment to ensure that a comprehensive agenda is addressed with a view to overcoming any obstacles which may arise. We are determined to see these negotiations through successfully, as speedily as we can.

The negotiations will continue, with or without Sinn Fein. The requirement for Sinn Fein's participation remains an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. Obviously IRA attacks make it progressively harder to convince the Government, and others, that any ceasefire will be genuine and unequivocal.

The negotiations will also address the International Body's proposals on decommissioning. The two Governments will approach this on the basis of securing the implementation of all aspects of the International Body's Report, including its proposal for some decommissioning during the negotiations, in a process which acknowledges neither victory nor defeat.

If Sinn Fein wish to join these negotiations, it is for Sinn Fein and the IRA to consider how they can now demonstrate convincingly, through their words and actions, that any ceasefire is genuine and unequivocal and not merely a further tactical device. In the light of the Manchester bomb and other attacks, it is for them to demonstrate their good faith.

Will the IRA treat any ceasefire the same as the last one and abandon it without warning whenever they want to? Is the IRA ready to bring to an end the violence and intimidation which persisted throughout the ceasefire and have continued since? How, since there is now inevitably such grave mistrust of the IRA's intentions, do they propose to convince the two Governments, the other political parties and the people of Northern Ireland that their word should now be relied on?

Will Sinn Fein, if they enter the negotiations, make a total and absolute commitment to the six principles of democracy and non-violence, as all the participants in the negotiations have already done? Do Sinn Fein accept that the outcome of any negotiations must be freely agreed by the participants, with no outcome pre-determined or excluded in advance? Do Sinn Fein accept the need in the negotiations to address the Mitchell proposals on decommissioning? If so, will Sinn Fein be able at that stage to show their intent to work constructively and in good faith to secure implementation of all aspects of the International Body's Report?

These are questions Sinn Fein need to consider if they genuinely wish to contribute to the peace process. If it can be demonstrated convincingly that Sinn Fein and the IRA genuinely want to take forward their objectives by exclusively peaceful means, that would be greatly in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland, and more widely, and the Government would respond accordingly.

I am always happy to see you on any matter to do with Northern Ireland. As for Ministerial dialogue with Sinn Fein, that requires an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. In present circumstances, it is difficult to see any purpose or justification in a meeting with officials such as occurred on 26 February when, it should be remembered, Sinn Fein wanted only a firm date for all-party talks. Any request for a similar meeting would be considered on the basis of the case made for it and in the light of all the circumstances including, crucially, events on the ground.

Yours sincerely,
John H.

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