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From the Private Secretary

18 July 1996

Dee Martin

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

Following the meeting between the Prime Minister and the SDLP yesterday, Hume rang me to say that he was pleased about the agreement to push ahead with the talks. But the real game was of course his discussions with Adams and the proposal he had made to us. He had talked again to Adams on 16 July. Adams had repeated that if the British Government would state that the negotiations would be serious and comprehensive; that decommissioning would only be tackled during the negotiations; and that they would do all in their power to promote other confidence-building measures during the talks; then the IRA would immediately declare a ceasefire. If we warned Hume in advance, we would get a guarantee from Adams to this effect before we made our statement. And if there was a ceasefire, it would be for good this time. Adams had also said, in response to the Prime Minister's letter, that Sinn Fein would be prepared to commit themselves totally and absolutely to the Mitchell principles.

I made clear that I remained sceptical about the chances of a ceasefire. The idea that the IRA would be ready to stop immediately in return for statements of the kind he was talking about did not seem credible, given all the other signals coming from the IRA and Sinn Fein. And why did Adams's letter not say anything of the kind, but instead ask for a meeting?

Hume said that, while there were obviously still hardliners around, he had received absolutely clear assurances from Adams. Adams's letter did not refer to the statements or a new ceasefire because he could not possibly put these things in writing. Hume, who was (as usual) in a hurry to catch a plane, had to ring off at this point, but said he would await our response.

I subsequently mentioned this exchange to Teahon. He said that Adams had told them earlier in the day, in this context, that he wanted a meeting with

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the British first, at official level. If this could then be followed by a statement on the lines proposed (but Adams had mentioned also a timeframe for the talks), something might be possible in due course. Teahon said that he recognised that none of this carried real credibility. But he nevertheless urged us to consider a meeting with Sinn Fein, or at least a statement along the lines requested, particularly since it did not really pose any difficulties for us. Even if we did not believe results would follow, we had little to lose by making the effort, as long as it was sustainable politically for us, and the effort could help to raise our credibility with the Nationalists. I pointed out the difficulties with all this but said that we had ruled nothing out and would reflect further.

Perhaps we could have a further word about all this.

I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin by fax.

Yours are

John

JOHN HOLMES

Martin Howard, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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