



10 DOWNING STREET
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24 July 1996

THE PRIME MINISTER

Dear Aida,

Since my letter to you of 8 July, you have given further accounts of Sinn Fein's position about a renewed IRA ceasefire and all-party negotiations. It is obviously vital that there is no misunderstanding on these issues.

You have presented Sinn Fein's position as follows:

(i) Sinn Fein would like to know from the British Government:

- that the negotiations will be serious and comprehensive;
- that decommissioning will be tackled in parallel with the negotiations; and
- that the British Government will do all in its power to promote confidence-building during the talks.

- (ii) If Sinn Fein were told in advance that the Government would repeat publicly their position on these points, they would undertake (before such a public statement was made) that the IRA would respond to the statement by declaring a genuine and unequivocal ceasefire. Such a ceasefire would be for good this time.

- (iii) Once allowed to enter the negotiations following the establishment of such a ceasefire, Sinn Fein would affirm their total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles, as the other participants have done.

The truth is that Sinn Fein and the IRA should restore their ceasefire without any further prevarication. There is no possible justification for continued violence. And I have to say that I remain sceptical, given all the other evidence of continued preparation for further attacks, including the recent arrests in London, that more words from us can make a crucial difference.

However, if your presentation of Sinn Fein's position is correct, what Sinn Fein wants to know from the Government is no more than the Government has said publicly already. I attach words which could be used if we were convinced that this would make a material difference to the prospects of a new ceasefire.

We have also been told that Sinn Fein wants a meeting with British officials. There is of course no question of any Ministerial meeting with Sinn Fein in the absence of an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. If Sinn Fein believe a meeting with British officials for the purpose of confirming and explaining the position you have set out to us is needed, we would be prepared to consider such a request in the light of all the circumstances including, crucially, events on the ground.

John Hume Esq MP

John Hume
John Hume

The negotiations which started on 10 June are to secure an overall political settlement and will address all the issues relevant to that. Any participant can raise any issue. No outcome is predetermined or excluded in advance. The Government cannot answer for any other participant but, for its part, along with that of the Irish Government, it is committed to ensure that a comprehensive agenda is addressed with a view to overcoming any obstacles which may arise. The Government is determined to see these negotiations through successfully, as speedily as possible;

The negotiations will also address the International Body's proposals on decommissioning. At that stage, the Government, along with the Irish Government, will be seeking the commitment of all participants to work constructively to implement all aspects of the International Body's report, including its proposals for some decommissioning during the negotiations. The Government wishes to make urgent progress in this area, so that the negotiations on political issues can proceed in parallel with decommissioning;

We are committed to raising confidence through the Talks process. The International Body's report itself proposes a process of mutual confidence-building and we are committed to this as to all aspects of the report. Confidence-building is a two-way street. Against the background of the recent serious setback to confidence we hope that all parties will play their part in making it possible for future marches and parades to be handled without confrontation.