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NO. 357 P002

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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

9 October 1996

Dear Ken,

Mrs McN

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

John Hume called me again this morning. He said that he had been in touch further with Sinn Fein, and was now expecting a response from them soon, perhaps even tomorrow.

I said that I did not see how we could be expected to take this exercise seriously in the light of what had happened on Monday. Talk of a ceasefire in present circumstances had no credibility with us.

Hume said that he understood. But he remained optimistic, despite everything. There had always been a strain in republican thinking that they should make clear they were not surrendering. The attack on the Lisburn barracks could be seen in that light. I said that I found it hard to believe that the IRA were now in the business of a spectacular before a ceasefire. But even if they were, we had warned time and time again that any ceasefire in these circumstances could have no credibility. Hume commented that he was not looking for a temporary ceasefire but a permanent cessation. I said that that was what we wanted too, but I had seen no evidence to suggest that any such thing was on offer.

Hume said that he did not know what Sinn Fein's response would be, but Adams and other leaders had disappeared for the moment, and he believed there was now an intense debate going on within the ranks of the IRA about the right strategy.

Hume concluded that he would stay in touch. I made clear again that we would of course look at whatever Sinn Fein came back with, but any belief we might have had in this exercise could hardly exist following Monday's attack.

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Comment

The exchange was friendlier than the above account might suggest, but I did not want Hume to be under any illusion that we could simply pretend that Monday's attack had not happened, without closing the door on the exercise altogether.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

John

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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