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TO: Anglo-Irish Division

FOR THE ATTENTION OF: David Cooney

FROM: Joe Sheehan

DATE: 5 November 1996

NO. OF PAGES: 3

SUBJECT: Visa application by Mr Gerry Adams to visit Australia

Ambassador O'Brien has asked me to fax the attached letter to you regarding the application by Mr Gerry Adams for a visa to visit Australia.

Polan
hwh
11.11.96

Regards

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SEEN BY
TAOISEACH

Taoiseach
11/11/96

HQ, D/FA are advising our Ambassador to continue to avoid involvement - matter for the Australians. This seems the best course in view of other current developments. It is also in line with our standard line re requests for visas to enter the U.S.

No doubt Adams' trip was planned some time ago but his plan to travel on Thursday or Friday next raises questions re other current developments
hwh 5/11/96

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5 November 1996

Mr David Cooney
Anglo-Irish Division

Confidential

Visa Application by Mr Gerry Adams to visit Australia

Dear David

You will already have received a report from Joe Sheehan of today's newspaper coverage here of the Adams visa application to visit Australia.

In the course of the day I've had two conversations about the visa application with the British High Commissioner. The High Commissioner said that it was his information that yesterday's discussion at the Federal Cabinet Meeting had been inconclusive. When considering controversial visa applications the Federal Cabinet considers three main areas of concern in reaching their decision - the first is security, the second is character, and the third area is that of foreign policy implications. It was readily agreed at yesterday's Cabinet meeting that the visit constituted no security threat towards Australia. However there was an incomplete discussion on the question of character which focussed on whether or not Adams has a criminal record and on his associations with those who have. In the discussion, according to the High Commissioner, the Minister for Immigration, Mr Phillip Ruddock, MP, (a former deputy chairman of the Federal Parliament's Irish Friendship Group) adopted a particularly legalistic view - internment is not conviction - as a result of which he was asked by the Prime Minister to further consider the question of character and if he was not convinced that Adams could be denied a visa on the basis of the criteria applied by his Department, he should consult Foreign Minister Downer to consider the foreign policy implications of granting a visa to the President of Sinn Féin.

The High Commissioner is fully satisfied that in any discussion between Ruddock and Downer the latter would strongly argue that the visa application should be refused on foreign policy grounds. However, the High Commissioner is concerned (a) that the debate in the Cabinet has gone this far without a clear decision to refuse the visa and (b) that Ruddock may insist on a precise adherence to the legally based regulation governing the evaluation of the "character" component of the visa application. In the second telephone conversation the High Commissioner said that he had, in the main, confirmed the above in a conversation this afternoon with First Assistant Secretary Ruth Pearce, Assistant Secretary Ian Forsyth and Mr Andrew Robb of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. In addition, he had been told that the issue had now become urgent since the Sinn Féin President had informed them (presumably through the Australian Embassy in Dublin) that he is making arrangements to purchase his ticket and to leave for Sydney on Thursday or Friday of this week. The High

Commissioner was assured that Adams had been told that he should not proceed with any travel arrangements on the presumption that he would be granted a visa. However it is likely that the Australian side will make a decision on the visa in the next few days.

In the course of the first conversation, but more explicitly in the course of the second conversation, the High Commissioner urged me to ask Dublin if there was anything which the Irish authorities could say to the Australians to urge them to decline the visa application. In my response on both occasions I emphasised that we regard the issue as one which is for the Australian authorities themselves. However, in the course of the second conversation, the High Commissioner argued more strongly that some signal from Dublin would be useful since it would "not be in either of our interests" to have the President of Sinn Fein undertake a visit to Australia at this time. He had told the Australian side - and I presume that this was in conversation with Foreign Minister Downer - that a favourable decision on the visa application would send an entirely wrong signal on the Peace Process and could be misunderstood as an acceptance of Sinn Fein's place in the Peace Process after the resumption of the bombing campaign and particularly in the aftermath of the bomb in Lisburn. I left the conversation on the basis that I would in the normal way be reporting on the two conversations he had with me and that I would include a reference to his particular views at this time. I did however emphasise that the Australians are regularly briefed on the Peace Process, that there had been two recent meetings between the Tánaiste and Foreign Minister Downer, and that the Australian Embassy in Dublin follows events closely and is actively involved in the work of the International Fund for Ireland. I was therefore convinced that the Australians have sufficient information about the situation on the ground to inform Canberra fully on the foreign policy aspects of any decision in relation to the visa application. However I have no doubt that this is an issue on which he will return to me again in the next few days or at least until a decision is made.

It is very clear that at least locally - and I should emphasise that this may be originating from the High Commissioner himself - that there is a keen desire to bring us into the task of persuading the Australians to refuse an entry visa to the President of Sinn Fein. While I have not sought in my conversations with the High Commissioner, given his high level of anxiety about the way the visa application is being dealt with on the Australian side, to put too much distance between us, I have sought nonetheless to maintain the approach outlined in your conversation with Ambassador Stevens in Dublin. However it is clear that the High Commissioner would like a more specific statement at this stage and I have sought as you will note from my comments above to avoid giving him any such specific commitment.

While a visit to Australia by the President of Sinn Fein may not be in our interest - the Irish Government's interest - as asserted by the High Commissioner, the question of the desirability of saying that to the Australian side is clearly a matter of policy (and a departure from present policy) and could have difficult implications for us if such a signal became publicly known. I would be grateful for any advice which you have to offer.

Yours sincerely

Richard A. O'Brien
Ambassador