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From the Private Secretary

13 September 1996

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

Dear Gen.

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

Thank you for your letter of 11 September and the attached drafts.

The Prime Minister remains very sceptical about this exercise. He does not believe the IRA are in fact ready to declare a new ceasefire and is wary of being drawn into a situation where we can be accused, however unfairly, of secret discussions with the IRA about conditions for a new ceasefire.

He accepts that we must respond to Hume's approach, and respond in such a way that we do not appear to discuss out of hand a possible opportunity for real progress. But he is not willing to be drawn further into this exercise without discussion in NI. He also believes that we must somehow bring the Unionists into the loop, to reduce the risk of later accusations of secret dealings and bad faith if the exchanges leak (as must be only too likely).

In the Prime Minister's view, therefore, the next step is to draft a short paper for NI setting out what has happened so far and recommending our next steps. I would be grateful if work could be set in hand urgently. NI could meet as early as next Thursday 19 September. We will be in touch about this separately.

... Meanwhile I attach amended versions of your drafts, with which the Prime Minister would be happier, if it is decided in the end to go ahead with the kind of response you recommend.

John Hume will no doubt keep pressing me for a response, as he has already. I will tell him that we are still looking at this, and are taking some time because we need to get it right in what is obviously a sensitive area. But I

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DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO

will also spell out to him again that the Prime Minister remains unconvinced that the IRA is ready to declare a new ceasefire, given the other evidence we see and hear. I will add that another attack by the IRA would destroy any credibility in the approaches we have received, and that the level of punishment beatings does nothing to persuade us that the IRA is likely to change its spots.

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

The IRA's position, as you describe it, is that if we were ready to make this statement, and the IRA knew when we were going to make it, they would respond shortly afterwards, at a time specified in advance, with an unequivocal restoration of the August 1994 "total cessation".

Yours ever

When I wrote to you on 24 July I said that the IRA should restore their ceasefire without any further prevarication. However, in response to the suggestion that reassurances from the British Government on certain issues in line with its established public policy would help to bring this about, I set out words which could be used.

John

JOHN HOLMES

Now they have returned with one significant issue - the timeframe - which is simply not under our control, and an altogether longer text covering a host of other issues. Meanwhile, we know that continued preparation for further IRA attacks goes on - and so-called punishment attacks continue to

Ken Lindsay, Esq.
Northern Ireland Office

It remains the case that the IRA should restore their ceasefire without further ado and without the need for further statements. The Government is certainly not in the business of negotiating a restoration of the IRA ceasefire, nor in giving secret assurances to bring it about. Sinn Fein must understand that we mean in private what we say in public. They must also understand that any further attack will reduce their credibility to zero, with us and with others.

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**DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO
JOHN HUME ESQ MP MEP**

Thank you for your letter of 8 August and the text which you faxed on 6 September.

The IRA's position, as you describe it, is that if we were ready to make this statement, and the IRA knew when we were going to make it, they would respond shortly afterwards, at a time specified in advance, with an unequivocal restoration of the August 1994 "total cessation".

When I wrote to you on 24 July I said that the IRA should restore their ceasefire without any further prevarication. However, in response to the suggestion that reassurances from the British Government on certain issues in line with its established public policy would help to bring this about, I set out words which could be used.

Now they have returned with one significant issue - the timeframe - which is simply not under our control, and an altogether longer text covering a host of other issues. Meanwhile, we know that continued preparation for further IRA attacks goes on - and so-called punishment attacks continue to increase in number and brutality.

It remains the case that the IRA should restore their ceasefire without further ado and without the need for further statements. The Government is certainly not in the business of negotiating a restoration of the IRA ceasefire, nor in giving secret assurances to bring it about. Sinn Fein must understand that we mean in private what we say in public. They must also understand that any further attack will reduce their credibility to zero, with us and with others.

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DRAFT STATEMENT

If there is genuine doubt or uncertainty over the Government's policy, I am happy to look at that. If it will bring about a genuine and unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, I will repeat and reaffirm our policy. [With that in mind, I have had the statement you sent me redrafted, as attached, to reflect existing Government policy.]

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DRAFT STATEMENT

The negotiations which started on 10 June are to secure an overall political settlement and will address all the issues relevant to that. They are intended to be inclusive, involving both Governments and all the relevant political parties with the necessary democratic mandate and commitment to exclusively peaceful methods.

The prospects for success in these negotiations will be greatly enhanced if they are conducted in a peaceful environment. Under the relevant legislation, if the Government considers that there is an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, Sinn Fein will be invited to nominate a team to participate in the negotiations. Beyond that, the two Governments are agreed that these negotiations are without preconditions.

It is equally clear that, to be successful, the negotiations must be peaceful, based on exclusively democratic and peaceful means and without recourse to the threat (actual or implied) or use of violence or coercion. On entry to the negotiations, each participant needs therefore to make clear their total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the Report of the International Body.

The spectrum of issues on which an overall agreement is dependent means that the negotiations will be on the basis of a comprehensive agenda, adopted by agreement, with each participant able to raise any significant issue of concern to them and receive a fair hearing for those concerns without their ability to do so being subject to the veto of any other party in the negotiations. Any participant in the format in question will be free to raise any aspect of the three relationships, including constitutional issues and any other matter which it

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considers relevant. No negotiated outcome is either predetermined or excluded in advance.

As the communiqué of 28 February made clear, the opening plenary 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 during the negotiations to implement all aspects of the International Body's report, including its compromise approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of negotiations. The Government wishes to make urgent progress in this area so that the process of decommissioning, rather than being regarded as a precondition to further progress, is used to build confidence one step at a time during the negotiations. As progress is made on political issues, even modest mutual steps on decommissioning could help create the atmosphere needed for further steps in a progressive pattern of mounting trust and confidence.

All parties are treated equally in the negotiations in accordance with the scale of their democratic mandate. No party has an undemocratic advantage.

It has been accepted that all participants will negotiate in good faith, seriously address all aspects of the agreed agenda and make every effort to reach a comprehensive agreement. For their part, the two Governments are committed to seek to ensure that all items on the comprehensive agenda are fully addressed and to do so themselves with a view to overcoming any obstacles which may arise.

The British Government is wholly committed to upholding, so far as we are able, our responsibility to encourage, facilitate and enable the achievement of

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agreement in the negotiations based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions. We want to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement.

The Government, for our part, is determined to see these negotiations through successfully, as speedily as possible. This is at one with the hopes and aspirations of people in both Britain and the Irish Republic, which have already sustained momentum in a process which will always have its difficulties. The Government has already proposed that a meeting of the plenary should be held at a suitable date to take stock of progress in the negotiations as a whole. It will support any agreed timeframe for the conduct of the negotiations adopted by the participants.

We are committed to raising confidence through the talks process and through a range of other measures alongside it. The International Body's report itself proposes a process of mutual confidence-building.

The Government will continue to pursue social and economic policies informed by the principles of equality of opportunity, equity of treatment and parity of esteem irrespective of political, cultural or religious affiliation or gender. We are committed to enhancing community identification with policing in Northern Ireland.

In response to the ceasefires of autumn 1994, the Government undertook a series of confidence-building measures in response to the changed level of threat, including changed arrangements for release of prisoners, security force redeployments, a review of emergency legislation and others. If the threat reduces again, the opportunity for further confidence-building measures returns.

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Confidence-building is a two-way street. Support for the use of violence is incompatible with participation in the democratic process. An end to punishment beatings and other paramilitary activities, including surveillance and targeting, is needed to underpin a commitment to peaceful methods and help build trust.

The opportunity for progress has never been greater. The negotiations command wide support internationally and have the benefit of independent chairmen from the USA, Canada and Finland. They have the overwhelming support of people throughout these islands, who also greatly desire that they take place in a peaceful environment, free of all paramilitary violence.

Minister agree to speak to a group of Irish journalists in the UK for a meeting of the British/Irish Inter Parliamentary Body from 23 to 25 September. The Prime Minister is willing to do this in principle. It was agreed earlier this year that we should make a greater PR effort in the Republic, and this would fit in.

However, it is not easy to fit this into the diary. Perhaps you could liaise with Arabella Warburton here about this. Even if we can fix a time, we may need to put in a stronger than usual caveat that cancellation at short notice cannot be excluded.

I would be grateful if, on the assumption that the meeting goes ahead, I could receive co-ordinated briefing from you and the NIO on Friday 20 September.

I am copying this letter to Ken Lindsay (Northern Ireland Office).

JOHN HOLMES

S. J. Sharpe, Esq.,

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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