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10 DOWNING STREET  
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From the Private Secretary

8 August 1996

Dear Ken,

### HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

John Hume telephoned this afternoon to up-date us on the position following our conversation of 26 July (my letter of that date).

Hume said that Adams was still discussing with his people the text enclosed with the Prime Minister's letter to Hume of 24 July.

But it remained essential that all sides should understand accurately each other's position. As he had previously explained to me, Hume thought the description of Sinn Fein's position in the Prime Minister's letter (the three tirets in point (i) of page 1) needed clarification. He had therefore asked Adams to set out Sinn Fein's position. Adams had done so, on a sheet of paper which Hume was now sending us, under cover of a short letter to the Prime Minister. Hume emphasised that this was an interim step, pending a response from Adams. He also stressed the confidentiality of his letter.

I asked whether this meant that Adams had now seen the Prime Minister's letter (ie as well as its enclosure). Hume confirmed that he had. His reaction had been "fairly positive", but he had agreed that the description of Sinn Fein's position was simplistic and needed clarification. Hume added that he (Hume) continued to think that it would be helpful for UK officials to meet Adams, once the latter had responded, to go through Sinn Fein's position in more detail and avoid any misunderstandings.

I said that we would look at Adams' response on the merits when it arrived. But we would also need to reconcile it with continued IRA activity on the ground. Hume agreed, and claimed that he had made this clear to Adams throughout. He remained hopeful that a renewed ceasefire could be secured. There was a powerful mood for this amongst people across the Province. They wanted peace, and that message was getting through "in all quarters". He had had 25 years' experience. He knew whereof he talked. The popular will for peace still obtained despite the tensions associated with Drumcree and its

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aftermath and the Apprentice Boys' march in Londonderry.

When I rang Hume subsequently to confirm receipt of his fax, we agreed that it would be best to leave substantive comment on Adams' description of Sinn Fein's position until we also had his reaction to the form of words. But I said that while nothing in it caused me particular surprise, there were nonetheless some very obvious areas of difficulty. We had spoken in our last conversation of the problems caused by the idea of a set time-frame. And on decommissioning, while I agreed there should be no pre-conditions, this subject must be taken forward on the basis set out by Mitchell: Sinn Fein could not simply put the whole subject off until the end of the talks process. Hume agreed: this was "on the button". Hume said that we should not misconstrue the list of issues in Adams' third point. These were all, in Hume's view, subjects which could be tackled in the course of the talks, not before them.

We agreed to await Adams' further response (comment: I do not think that Hume's letter to the Prime Minister needs a separate reply meanwhile).

Marches

I said that we much appreciated Hume's efforts to secure an agreed way through over the Apprentice Boys' march. We still hoped that it might be possible to reach a mutually satisfactory accommodation before Friday. There was too much at stake in terms of Londonderry's economic and general well-being for anyone to be able to afford anything like a repeat of Drumcree. Hume fervently agreed. He would continue his efforts.

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

*Yours etc.*

*Edward Oakden*

EDWARD OAKDEN

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Northern Ireland Office

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