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cc Mr Wood (L&B)
Mr Budd, Cabinet Office
Jonathan Stephens. 21/1/97

FROM: Ambassador
DATE: 20 January 1997

cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L)
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Thomas (B&L)
Mr Steele
Mr Stephens
Mr Leach
Mr Bell
Mr Hill (B&L)
Mr Brooker
Ms Bharucha
Mr MacCabe
Mr Lamont, RID, FCO

PS/PUS

YOUR VISIT: 16-17 JANUARY

1. I was delighted to see you, Quentin Thomas and Jonathan Stephens here last week. Others are recording separately more detailed accounts of the dinner with Paddy Teahon and his colleagues; the "not for use" press conference; and the lunch with Bertie Ahern and colleagues.

2. Seen from here, the visit was a great success. We had useful and wide-ranging discussions with Paddy Teahon, Tim Dalton, Wally Kirwan and David Donoghue, focussing on the peace process and all-party talks rather than any individual points of potential dispute. While clearly there was not always meeting of minds, the atmosphere was extremely good. I thought I detected a greater willingness on the Irish side to accept the rationale behind our arguments.

3. It is too early to judge whether the press briefing on 17 January had the desired effect of giving local commentators a better understanding of our position. There was nothing in the weekend press. But from feedback we have already received, the journalists found it very useful. At the very least, they must have gone away with an impression of our determination to find solutions to intractable problems. Some of them, I think, were forced to reflect on unpalatable truths, e.g. when Quentin Thomas explained that the reason why Sinn Fein were not admitted to the talks process at the end of 1994 was that there was no talks process to be admitted to!

4. The lunch with Bertie Ahern, Mary O'Rourke, Ray Butler and Martin Manser, also struck a positive note. This does not mean that Fianna Fail will eschew disobliging remarks about the British Government in future - there are still votes in bashing the British - but they too appeared to accept the honesty of our intentions; at least I hope so.

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5. All this leads me to believe that such visits should take place more frequently. It may be difficult for all three of you to find time to come together, but I would hope that, say once a quarter, one or more of you could come for a short programme, which we could vary accordingly to the situation. We might perhaps include lunch with a suitable Government Minister - e.g. Mrs Owen.

6. I do not, of course, wish to cut across the Joint Liaison Group meetings, but for the time being these are in abeyance. In any case, my own belief - which we have discussed from time to time - is that something more informal is called for. Perhaps you could let me know what you think in due course?

(SIGNED)

Veronica Sutherland
Ambassador

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