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10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

f / Irishsinn. as  
be EO  
JH  
Am Box

From the Private Secretary

26 September 1996

Dear Ken,

### IRISH/SINN FEIN CONTACTS

Paddy Teahon telephoned me this evening to report on the latest meeting between Irish officials and Sinn Fein. He said that he had already given an account to Veronica Sutherland, but wanted to pass on the main points to me too. He said that the conversation had had four main elements:

- (i) the Irish side had underlined to Sinn Fein in no uncertain terms that they could not go on talking to Sinn Fein in this way when the IRA continued to plant bombs in Britain. They had spelt out that they were not saying this for the sake of it but because it was the simple truth;
- (ii) the Irish had asked Sinn Fein whether, if the talks moved on to the three strands and discussion on decommissioning, and if the British Government made a statement along the lines of that proposed by John Hume, there would be a new IRA ceasefire. In response, the Sinn Fein side had made noises about the language which they had given to Hume being the minimum required. But in the end their answer had been yes. I pressed Teahon on this point. The Sinn Fein response of "yes" had not been absolutely clear cut. They had to pretend they were not the IRA. But it did not just mean that Sinn Fein would go to the IRA and try to persuade them. It seemed to mean that they would go to the IRA and had every reason to believe that they would be persuaded. He said that the Irish had been clear in saying that the British Government could not be expected to use the words which Hume had given to us. Sinn Fein appeared to accept this.
- (iii) the Irish had given Sinn Fein an account of what was happening in the talks. They had not oversold the degree of movement but had given an honest appraisal;
- (iv) Sinn Fein had underlined that media suggestions in Dublin that the IRA were sitting out the present situation and waiting for a British General Election were wrong. They recognised that the present British Prime Minister had taken a personal interest, and that they had no reason to suppose any subsequent Prime Minister would be easier to deal with.

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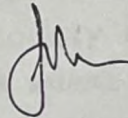
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I explained to Teahon where we were in our response to Hume, and said that we would send it to him as soon as it issued, probably tomorrow morning. He was grateful. He continued to be relatively optimistic about a ceasefire, in the face of my scepticism, but admitted that it was still difficult to see how the Sinn Fein/IRA leadership could regard a British Government restatement of policy as enough to change things substantially and to allow them to convince the grass roots that they had so changed. I made clear to Teahon that the words we would be sending to Hume were not negotiable, and were not the same as Hume had sent us. Teahon was under no illusions. His intention would be to tell Sinn Fein that, whether they liked all the words or not, this was the best they could expect and it was now up to them to deliver. He hoped the Americans would do the same.

I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and by fax to Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

*Yours ever*



JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.,  
Northern Ireland Office.

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