

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

Nevertheless, if there is genuine doubt or uncertainty over the Government's policy, I am happy to look at that. Because I am in no doubt of the benefits, for the people of Northern Ireland and the negotiations, of a genuine and unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, we will repeat and reaffirm our approach on the key issues. The attached text has been prepared for this purpose, and will be published in the near future.

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. But, 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, continued preparation for further IRA attacks goes on, as the arrests and arms finds on Monday demonstrate all too clearly. Intimidation and so-called punishment attacks also continue to increase in

CONFIDENTIAL

number and brutality. As I have already said publicly, Sinn Fein's talk of peace can have little credibility against this background.

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.

Nevertheless, if there is genuine doubt or uncertainty over the Government's policy, I am happy to look at that. Because I am in no doubt of the benefits, for the people of Northern Ireland and the negotiations, of a genuine and unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, we will repeat and reaffirm our approach on the key issues. The attached text has been prepared for this purpose, and will be published in the near future.

The prospects for success in these negotiations will obviously be much greater if they take place in a peaceful environment. Under the legislation setting up the talks, if the Government believes 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 British and Irish Governments are agreed that these negotiations are without preconditions.

It is equally clear that, to be successful, the negotiations must be based on exclusively democratic and peaceful means. There must be no reliance on the threat (actual or implied) or use of violence or coercion. So, in entering the negotiations, each participant needs to make clear their total and absolute

John Hume, Esq., M.P.

This Government has made clear its approach to the search for peace in Northern Ireland on many occasions. But we continue to be asked about this or that aspect, particularly about the multi-party negotiations which started on 10 June in Belfast. There has been continued speculation about a new IRA ceasefire, despite the latest huge arms and explosives find in London. This has renewed questions about what effect this would have on the negotiations, and whether and if so how Sinn Fein could join the talks in these circumstances. It may therefore be helpful to spell out our position again.

The negotiations have one overriding aim: to reach an overall political settlement, achieved through agreement and founded on consent. They will address all the issues relevant to such a settlement. Inclusive in nature, they involve 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 obviously be much greater if they take place in a peaceful environment. Under the legislation setting up the talks, if the Government believes 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 British and Irish Governments are agreed that these negotiations are without preconditions.

It is equally clear that, to be successful, the negotiations must be based on exclusively democratic and peaceful means. There must be no recourse to the threat (actual or implied) or use of violence or coercion. So, on entering the negotiations, each participant needs 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 chaired by Senator George Mitchell. The parties in the talks have all done just that already.

The range of issues on which an overall agreement will depend means that the negotiations will be on the basis of a comprehensive agenda. This will be adopted by agreement. Each participant will be able to raise any significant issue of concern to them, and to receive a fair hearing for those concerns, without this being subject to the veto of any other party. Any aspect can be raised, including constitutional issues and any other matter which any party considers relevant. No negotiated outcome is either predetermined or excluded in advance or limited by anything other than the need for agreement.

Among the crucial issues is decommissioning. So the opening plenary will address the International Body's proposals on decommissioning of illegal arms. At that stage, we, along with the Irish Government, will be looking for the commitment of all participants to work constructively during the negotiations to implement all aspects of the International Body's report. This includes its compromise approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of negotiations. We want to make urgent progress in this area so that the process of decommissioning is not seen as a precondition to further progress, but 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.

It is important to emphasise that all parties are treated equally in the negotiations in accordance with the scale of their democratic mandate. No party has an undemocratic advantage. The negotiations will operate on the basis of consensus, requiring at least the support of parties representing a

majority of both the unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland. But no one party can prevent them continuing by withdrawing from the negotiations.

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

For our part, we are wholly committed to upholding, so far as we can, our responsibility to facilitate agreement in the negotiations. This must be based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions. We want to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement.

We are also determined to see these negotiations through successfully, as speedily as possible. This is in line with the hopes and aspirations of people in both the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic. These have already given momentum to a process which will always have its difficulties. We have already proposed that a plenary meeting should be held at a suitable date to take stock of progress in the negotiations as a whole. We will support any agreed timeframe for the conduct of the negotiations adopted by the participants.

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

So we will continue to pursue social and economic policies based on 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 increasing community identification with policing in Northern Ireland.

It is worth recalling that, in response to the ceasefires of Autumn 1994 and the changed level of threat, we undertook a series of confidence-building measures. These included changed arrangements for release of prisoners in Northern Ireland under the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act 1996, security force redeployments, a review of emergency legislation and others. If the threat reduces again, the opportunity for further confidence-building measures returns.

But 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, would demonstrate real commitment to peaceful methods and help build trust.

The opportunity for progress has never been greater. The negotiations are widely supported internationally and benefit from independent chairmen from the USA, Canada and Finland. They also have the overwhelming support of people throughout these islands. They want them to take place in a peaceful environment, free of all paramilitary violence. That is our aim too.