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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA*ful**Forwarded to NID
+ HWA Dublin.*

From the Private Secretary

24 February 1997

*Dear Gen,***NORTHERN IRELAND: PRESS ARTICLE**

We spoke briefly over the weekend about the article by Gerry Adams in Saturday's Irish Times. As I told you, Paddy Teahon rang me on Saturday morning to explore our reactions. It was running as a big story in Dublin, and the press were suggesting that the article was part of a pre-arranged deal with us. Teahon said that Sinn Fein had also been in touch with him and others to draw attention to the significance of the article.

I said that I was unsighted but that, from Teahon's description, it did not sound as if the article contained much that was new. Adams was no doubt trying to recover some political and PR ground, following the strong reaction to the death of Stephen Restorick and the tough article by John Hume. We would obviously want to look at the article, but our views had not changed. What was needed was not more words, but a credible IRA ceasefire. We had no wish to delay Sinn Fein's entry to talks in that event.

I understand that, in fact, John Hume had given us on Friday afternoon answers to the questions we gave him the previous week, and that he had suggested an article by Adams might appear soon. You are looking at the answers and will revert to us with advice in the next few days.

I spoke again to Teahon on Sunday to pass on that Hume had given us answers (he was by then already aware himself from Sean O'hUiggin). He said that there were once again increasing hints, including from Hume, that an early IRA ceasefire might be possible. The Taoiseach was sceptical, to say the least, and Irish intelligence had seen no indications of a change of IRA tack. However, the Irish view remained that it was best to call Adams' bluff about this by giving

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- 2 -

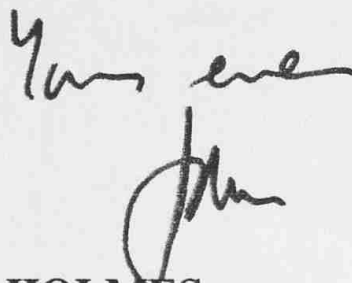
a more concrete indication than we had so far about when Sinn Fein could join the talks, in the event of an acceptable ceasefire (words and deeds etc).

Teahon added that the Taoiseach was well aware how difficult this was for us, particularly with continuing IRA violence, but an indication of timescale for Sinn Fein's entry remained the key. If we could not say anything now, the Taoiseach wondered whether it might be easier for the Prime Minister to say something positive once the election campaign here had started.

I confirmed that we would be looking at Adams' answers and his article – I understood that the language of both was similar – but that I could not hold out too much encouragement that a change of view by us would be possible. We agreed to stay in touch.

... Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has approved the attached slightly revised version of the draft article on which you commented last week. But we obviously need to consider now how publication of such an article would fit with the Adams' article. Any article by the Prime Minister will be scrutinised for signs of a response to what Adams said. We need to think through how such an article can best fit in to the message we want to send. It would therefore be helpful to have rapid advice on the Adams' article and the Hume answers, including any assessment of whether there is a real chance of a new ceasefire.

I am copying this letter to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and Veronica Sutherland (HMA Dublin – by fax).

**JOHN HOLMES**

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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