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cc *PR**File
26/3.*

Ref: BO.2251

MR SANDERSON

cc **Mr Holmes**
Ms Polley

EAST/WEST (BRITISH/IRISH) RELATIONS

1. As you know, I visited Dublin on 24 March for talks with Wally Kirwan of the Taoiseach's office. HM Ambassador plus Messrs Clarke and Tansley were also present on our side, as were a number of Kirwan's colleagues, including members of the Foreign Ministry.
2. Kirwan handed out at the start copies of the attached agenda and folder, which includes a copy of the Taoiseach's address to the British/Irish Inter-Parliamentary body on 3 March.
3. The meeting, which lasted 1½ hours and was followed by lunch, was held in an extremely warm and friendly atmosphere. It was clear, incidentally, as regards the Roisin McAliskey case, that at least as far as the Taoiseach is concerned our recent actions have defused the problem.
4. We brainstormed extensively across the range of East/West relations. Main points of interest as follows:
 - we agreed that we should continue to look out for an opportunity to create a greater public profile for the now extensive activities in this area. Ideally, we needed to issue some kind of joint document at a press conference attended by both the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach. Short of that, there might be a case for issuing a text in capitals on the

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occasion of a meeting between the principals elsewhere, even if such a meeting were informal in nature (eg at Chequers, without a press conference);

- we noted that particularly useful steps forward in bilateral relations over the past year had included cooperation in the fight against drugs, contacts between the two Home Offices, the first Ministerial contact for a long time in the defence field, and a variety of steps in the transport sector. The 11 page text in the Kirwan folder ("Second Progress Report") sets out the position in detail. Please run it past the departments concerned on our side, to see whether we would have points to amend or to add;
- the only problem of any note on the inter-governmental front concerns broadcasting, where as you know a number of difficulties remain to be resolved before RTE transmissions can be received in Northern Ireland.

5. We had a constructive discussion of the scope for additional cooperation between NGOs (you will remember the points made in the paper attached to HM Ambassador's letter of 11 February). We agreed that a working group of some 4 or 5 key players from each side should be brought together as soon as convenient in order to discuss in more detail possible ways forward.

6. Wally Kirwan predictably prefaced the above discussion by noting that the Irish Government would always want to avoid making a public splash about East/West relations at times when there was tension related to events in Northern Ireland. He

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and his team were nonetheless plainly intent on moving forward wherever we can. There is much of promise here for the future.

7. I should be grateful if you would investigate one particular thought. Richard Clarke of HM Embassy wondered aloud whether the two countries should not aim to undertake some project in common in connection with the Millennium. This idea was not further developed, but is in my view worth some reflection. As a first step, please ask the Millennium organisers (on the Mackenzie side) whether there is any question of other countries being allowed pavilions of their own. If so then we should certainly keep the likely Irish interest in mind. And even if not, we should not rule out the thought of an exception on sui generis grounds being made for the Republic.

CRB

COLIN BUDD

26 March 1997

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