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ANNEX

SUSPENSION OF IRA OPERATIONSLINES TO TAKE

- My immediate reaction is one of regret that this is not described as the lasting and unequivocal ceasefire which we, the Irish and American Governments have long called for and which is owed to the people of Northern Ireland.
- So far as it goes, however, it is of course welcome.
- It does not appear that the IRA has put any timelimit on this suspension of their activities -- and that is how it should be. What all decent people want is an end to the violence for ever; I hope that this message is now fully understood, and taken on board by those who have been involved in acts of violence in the past.
- I hope that this suspension of activities will turn out to be the beginning of the genuine and lasting ceasefire that we need. If that were to be the case, and if Sinn Fein were ready to commit itself exclusively to peaceful methods and to the democratic process, then the way would be open for them to join the Talks - (something which they say is of very great importance to them.)

Supplementaries

- Q. Does this mean that Sinn Fein could join the talks on 3 June?

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A. - the requirements for that are quite clear and have not changed. The position of the British and Irish Governments, as set out in the talks Ground Rules in April 1996, is that Sinn Fein cannot be invited to the talks until there is an unequivocal ceasefire and until Sinn Fein have established a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and to the democratic process.

- there is nothing in today's announcement which suggests that this is the genuine and lasting ceasefire that will be needed before Sinn Fein could join the talks. Sinn Fein know what is needed; there must be a ceasefire which is convincingly unequivocal.

- I am not going to speculate on whether Sinn Fein could join the talks on 3 June; they know that to get their ticket there has to be an unequivocal ceasefire and a credible commitment to peaceful methods and the democratic process. Once those criteria are met I have a legal duty to invite them to the talks but only they can determine whether and when they are prepared to address the criteria.

Q. Will you be meeting Sinn Fein?

A. - there is no question of Ministers meeting Sinn Fein in advance of an unequivocal ceasefire. That is the position of the British and Irish Governments.

- it has been our position since the IRA campaign resumed last year that meetings between officials and Sinn Fein would be considered on their merits, in the light of circumstances on the ground. No such meetings have, in fact, taken place since shortly after the ceasefire ended. If we were to

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conclude that a meeting or meetings could be significant in terms of clarifying each others respective positions so as to make a permanent ceasefire far more likely then I should certainly consider that.

Q. Has HMG had any indirect contacts with Sinn Fein to help bring this announcement about?

A. - I have remained in contact with John Hume to ensure he has a clear understanding of the Prime Minister's statement of 28 November last year but this announcement has been made at the initiative of the Republican movement and is made on their terms and in their words. It is not the unequivocal ceasefire that I am looking for or that the vast majority of the people want. Of course, many people - politicians, church leaders, etc - are using their influence to try to bring an end to violence but, as far as I am concerned, this announcement is solely the work of Sinn Fein and the IRA.