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PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

From: Philip Barton

Date: 8 April 1997

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cc: John Holmes (o/r)

As you may have seen, the IRA have claimed responsibility for the bomb hoax which caused the postponement of the Grand National. Otherwise, there have been no major incidents since yesterday's hoax call to RTE claiming there was a bomb in the winners' enclosure at Aintree.

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At the same time, there have now been no IRA attacks in Northern Ireland since Easter Sunday and the RUC are observing a reduced level of operational activity. So a suspension in Northern Ireland may already have started, without being announced, or there may still be an announcement.

In the meantime, the NIO have circulated a line to take on the present situation and a revised provisional line on a possible suspension (see attached letter). The first picks up what you said in Downing Street on Saturday about the IRA's recent actions setting back peace talks. Sir Patrick Mayhew has been using it this morning, when he visited a couple of the churches recently attacked by arsonists.

You might like to glance at the transcript of his remarks – also attached.

SECRET

SECRET

- 2 -

As the NIO letter says, Sir Patrick Mayhew is keen not to rule out entirely the possibility of Sinn Fein joining the talks on 3 June. I think this would give the wrong impression if reflected in public. But the NIO line avoids speculation about specific dates and looks to me to be sufficiently robust. Sensibly, the NIO suggest others draw on the line to ensure that Ministers are saying the same thing (to avoid some of the problems the Opposition have faced). Are you **content** for others to use this line as necessary?

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The second line on a possible suspension will, of course, need to be looked at in the light of what actually happens. I think it is a bit lame at the moment.

Depending on what is said, you might want to challenge Adams and McGuinness to make clear that any suspension is an unequivocal and permanent ceasefire, rather than a cynical tactical move for the election period.

Philip

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