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10 DOWNING STREET  
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From the Private Secretary

24 April 1997

*Dear Idun,***MEETING WITH THE IRISH AMBASSADOR IN LONDON**

Ted Barrington gave me lunch on 23 April. We spent much of the time discussing election prospects and European policy, but we also covered the usual ground about Northern Ireland. A brief account may be helpful, although there were no surprises.

Barrington made clear that the Irish would want to make a further attempt to achieve inclusive talks by bringing in Sinn Fein, if there was any opportunity to do so. They continued to think that a date certain for their entry was the key issue for Sinn Fein. But he acknowledged that Irish impressions of IRA intentions were not optimistic. The Irish therefore recognised that they might need to conclude at some point that there was no chance of inclusive talks, and join a renewed effort to make talks without Sinn Fein succeed. The Irish would be reluctant to come to this conclusion, but were ready to do so if the facts warranted it.

It was clear from what Barrington said that the Irish continued to be gloomy about the prospects for the talks themselves, and would be quick to reach the conclusion that they are going nowhere. But he said that he had been urging Dublin to come cleaner on their interpretation of Mitchell on decommissioning (ie drop their emphasis on "consider"). I warned against any idea that the British and Irish Governments could simply move to an alternative approach based on trying to impose a frameworks type solution through referenda in both parts of Ireland. Barrington seemed slightly surprised - he commented that he had thought this was our idea rather than theirs. His main concern was to avoid any move towards the kind of approach favoured by Trimble.

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Barrington raised again the idea of a call on the Prime Minister, whoever it was, by the Taoiseach on 8 May. I repeated what I already told him on the telephone, that the timing of this was not ideal, particularly from the point of view of a new government. Barrington accepted this, but was not to be put off. However he agreed with my suggestion that, if the next Prime Minister did accept a call, this should be very clearly a courtesy call, perhaps over a cup of tea, without expectations of a substantive exchange and without large numbers of officials and a panting press pack. We agreed to be in touch about this again after the Election. It was clear incidentally that the Irish Embassy have indeed been in direct touch with the Labour Party about this idea, but no firm promises seem to have been made.

We also discussed parades and the North Report briefly. Barrington said that the Irish were alternately optimistic and pessimistic about Drumcree this year. In any case they remained convinced that the North Report's recommendation on adjudicatory powers for the Independent Commission was the right way forward, and clearly hoped that a new Government would implement this quickly.

The Irish Embassy have clearly done a lot of talking to the Labour Party about future policy, as you would expect. Barrington particularly mentioned Confidence-Building Measures, and suggested that the Irish might be able to throw into the pot a more forward attitude on Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution.

Barrington expected an Irish election this summer, but thought dates in June as likely as 23 May.

I am copying this to Sir John Coles (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin - by fax).

*Jan are*  
*John*

JOHN HOLMES

Sir John Chilcott  
Northern Ireland Office

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