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No. 4913 P. 8/11

Mr G Adams  
President of Sinn Fein  
51-55 Falls Road  
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May 1997

Thank you for your letter of 3 May. The Prime Minister has also asked me to reply to your letter of 2 May. I was, in any event, on the point of writing to you, because I am anxious that, while I am meeting the leaders of the other main parties in Northern Ireland, you and those you represent should also be in no doubt as to the Government's fundamental approach in seeking to promote reconciliation and overcoming the divisions which have contributed to conflict.

We endorse in full the principles, agreements and undertakings set out by the then British Government in conjunction with the Irish Government, including the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration, the Framework Document and the 28 February 1996 communiqué. These set out the guiding principles of our approach.

We uphold the principle of consent, set out in the Downing Street Declaration and endorsed by the Irish Government and the overwhelming majority of parties and people throughout these islands. A united Ireland will never come about through violence or intimidation.

Our primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement. We will implement any such agreement reached on the basis of self-determination and consent as set out in the Downing Street Declaration. No outcome

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is excluded or predetermined: the only limitation is the need for agreement between unionists and nationalists.

We believe the talks process offers the opportunity for genuine negotiations, on an inclusive basis and on an open agenda. But it is fundamental that such negotiations can take place only among those committed to exclusively peaceful methods and who have shown that they abide by the democratic process. In Sinn Fein's case, this requires an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, reflected in words and deeds so that the statutory requirements under the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations etc) Act 1996 are met. This is the most pressing step needed to reinvigorate the peace process. Other than this, there are no preconditions to negotiations. But while Sinn Fein does not meet these fundamental requirements, agreed with the Irish Government, the talks must continue without Sinn Fein.

We recognise the overwhelming need to promote genuine confidence among both unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland. We shall play our part. But the greatest gap in credibility and confidence is over whether republicans are prepared, genuinely and definitively, to commit themselves exclusively to the political process and to resolving all differences exclusively by peaceful means.

These are the principles which will underlie our approach in Northern Ireland, and to which we will hold. We shall not be diverted by violence or threats of violence. It is vital that there should be no misunderstanding about our approach and our commitment to follow it through consistently.

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In your letter (to the Prime Minister) you propose a meeting between Sinn Fein and officials to explore with urgency how, as you put it, the peace process can be rebuilt without further delay. As I have already said the unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire is the most pressing step needed.

We are ready in principle to envisage meetings between officials and Sinn Fein to carry that forward and, in particular, to ensure that there are no avoidable misunderstandings about the need for such a ceasefire as soon as possible and how, following it, Sinn Fein would be brought to join the political process in accordance with the principles I have set out and the statutory requirements. Agreement to such a meeting will depend, of course, on events on the ground. Subject to that, and to your agreement that it will be for the purpose stated, I shall be ready to consider authorising a meeting.

We are committed to a genuine peace process. We are prepared to play our part to build the trust and confidence necessary for it to succeed. But a genuine peace process can only be based upon a genuine commitment to lasting peace, exclusively peaceful methods and the democratic process.

I do not propose to release this letter to the press, but I will acknowledge publicly that I have written to you and for what purpose.

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