

**CONFIDENTIAL***File  
16/6.***From: John Holmes****Date: 28 May 1997****PRIME MINISTER****cc: Jonathan Powell  
Alastair Campbell  
Philip Barton****DEALINGS WITH SINN FEIN**

Officials had their second meeting with Sinn Fein today. It went reasonably well in tone, but Sinn Fein pushed harder. There is now a need to get into more detail about Sinn Fein's concerns, eg on CBMs and decommissioning, and about ours, on the durability of any ceasefire. This inevitably raises the question of a text setting out our understanding of the position – Sinn Fein have no trust in us (nor we in them) and always want written reassurances. They can also show this to their hardliners to demonstrate that Sinn Fein have gained something in exchange for a ceasefire.

This is of course where it gets difficult. Any HMG text will be (rightly) seen as the result of discussions with Sinn Fein – so much for not negotiating the terms of a ceasefire. It is not entirely easy to justify an effectively joint text with the political wing of the IRA. We don't negotiate such texts with the constitutional political parties. So why are we running after Sinn Fein? Surely they should just declare a ceasefire without having to be offered inducements to do so?

On the other hand, if a text which gives nothing of substance away is required to achieve a ceasefire, save lives and give the best chance to the talks, why not?

The last government was negotiating such a text (the Hume draft of 10 October was part of this process) and published a version of it on 28 November last year when the terms could not be agreed. Mo Mowlam and the NIO are clear that we

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will need to agree some kind of text, and show it in advance to the Americans and Irish, as well as Sinn Fein.

NIO have sent us a draft of such a text – attached, with their covering letter. I have made various comments on it in manuscript. Also attached for comparison are the texts published by the last government on 28 November 1996 and the Hume/Adams text of 10 October. You will see that there are many similarities with both. But the new draft is greener in tone than the 28 November text, and moves more towards the kind of language Sinn Fein wants. This is perhaps inevitable, but if the principle of a text is accepted, it is questionable whether we should shift so much towards Sinn Fein at the beginning. They will pocket this and ask for more.

✓ Meanwhile the Unionists are not happy. The local election results did not go their way, with Sinn Fein doing well and the nationalist vote overall up. They lost Belfast. They believe Mo has been showing a nationalist bias in her words and actions, despite her protestations to the contrary. As we discussed, we need to invite Trimble in before too long to cuddle him (although the substance of the discussion may not be easy to handle).

On other points, the loyalist ceasefire is increasingly questioned, and hence their participation in the talks, while the prospects for the marching season do not look good, despite Mo's efforts. The problem remains that the two factions on the ground in the sensitive areas will not talk to each other.

That is all background. The question for now is: are you content for a text on the lines of the one attached to be deployed in the next round of talks with Sinn

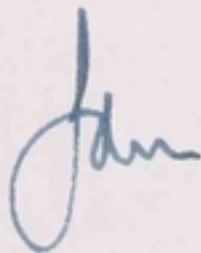
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Fein, probably next week, perhaps with a few modifications on the lines of the  
any comments?

You may want to discuss.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**JOHN HOLMES**

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