

CONFIDENTIAL *Me*



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From the Private Secretary

20 May 1997

Dear Gen,

SINN FEIN

Thank you for your letter of 20 May about handling of the meeting with Sinn Fein on 21 May (which I now see is fixed for noon at Stormont). The Prime Minister is content for the broad approach you set out to be followed.

As we discussed, the prospect of being drawn into negotiation of a new statement we are required to make is unattractive. It will no doubt tend to be a negotiation, however hard we try, where the pressure will come on to us to agree formulations we would rather avoid. The presentation of any statement will also be tricky, particularly if it differs significantly from 28 November. However, getting into a new text may prove unavoidable – and worth it if the prize of a satisfactory ceasefire can be achieved without sacrifice of principle on our side.

I should add that, as I told Quentin Thomas separately, Irish officials are meeting Sinn Fein again this evening, apparently to bring up to speed McGuinness, who missed the last meeting.

Thank you also for letting us have your views on the initial handling of the talks and decommissioning. This is very helpful.

I am copying this to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir John Kerr (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Yours ever
John

JOHN HOLMES

K. Lindsay, Esq.,
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