

CONFIDENTIAL

L.6
P.25/6

From: John Holmes
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PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

You are mulling over the relative merits of a statement tomorrow, or later, or not at all. I attach again the first draft of the statement I put together, and a possible draft letter to Trimble to precede the telephone call.

Having reflected further, my own instinct is that you should make a statement tomorrow. It is difficult because the message is not entirely clear – we are saying Sinn Fein can still come in, but in a heavily disguised way. But this does not get easier with time, and the dangers of a leak are considerable. There is a huge difference between volunteering a statement and having to make one. You can only manage to win Trimble over so far, even with more time.

Peter Mandelson's view this evening, having read the draft, was that you should make the statement tomorrow, and that the draft gave you the right protection, despite the difficulties. Most people would see your response as the right one.

Hume is coming in at 10 o'clock tomorrow. I suggest your aims should be:

- to let him see how angry and outraged you were by Monday's killings, and how close you came to writing off Sinn Fein;

P.10

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

- to make clear that the offer is still (just) on the table, but that Sinn Fein are wasting their time if they seek any modifications or additions to it (they are muttering about decommissioning);
- to make clear that you could not hold the position if there were further such attacks;
- and to try to bind him in to move on without Sinn Fein if they do put themselves out of court.

Hume's line will be that, while he utterly condemns the murders, they are, in a sense, inevitable as long as there is not a ceasefire, and that real peace is there for the taking with just one more effort. He deserves great respect for his efforts, but this message is becoming very tired, and is constantly disproved by reality.

JOHN HOLMES



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