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GERRY ADAMS MP  
SINN FÉIN  
PRESIDENT

20 June 1997

Tony Blair  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London

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Many thanks for the Aide Memoire which we received very late on Friday, 13 June 1997.

Quentin Thomas suggested in his cover note that Martin McGuinness would meet your representatives to go through the Aide Memoire and clarify any further points on either side. Sinn Fein agreed with that. However, unfortunately the meeting has been cancelled following the killing by the IRA of the two RUC officers on Monday. Can I say that I regret very much that these men were killed. I am disappointed also that our meeting has not gone ahead.

In the absence of this meeting, let me put to you, in writing, the points for clarification that we would have raised. I understand you may have points to raise with us. Naturally I would still prefer that such a meeting would take place so that we could directly raise these matters with one another.

I have made it clear on many occasions that Sinn Fein is not the IRA and that our party is not engaged in armed actions of any kind. The search for a democratic peace settlement can only be accomplished through dialogue. Your government may not agree with Sinn Fein's position on Irish sovereignty but our party has a mandate which should be recognised by your government. I know these are difficult times but it is very important that none of us are deflected from our responsibility to secure a lasting peace. I certainly will not be deflected even though there have been numerous attacks on Sinn Fein. For example, my offices in West Belfast have been bombed in recent weeks and last night there was an attempt to kill one of our councillors, James McCarry, and his family.

I know that you, as British Prime Minister, have to weigh up many factors but I wish to stress my belief that a lasting peace can be established if we intensify our efforts to remove the obstacles to dialogue. This can best be accomplished by face to face meetings.

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In the meantime, let me say that Sinn Fein comes very positively to the Aide Memoire. It is an advance on the positions adopted by the previous British government. It is worth noting that our efforts at this point are to effectively and definitively remove the obstacles to a meaningful and inclusive negotiations process which were erected by that government.

Your government has addressed in a much more positive way the issues involved. Absolute clarity, as I'm sure you will agree, is required. Of all the issues the one of decommissioning needs to be removed as an obstacle in the negotiations. I am told that you are engaged with the Irish government in an effort to do this and I hope you will be successful in your joint efforts. It would be very helpful if I knew in detail the substance of the paper the two governments are preparing. Clarity on the paper, the Independent Commission, the dedicated sub-committee and their respective terms of reference is crucial.

This single issue undermined the peace process and caused its collapse in February 1996. Since 10 June last year the Unionists have used the decommissioning issue to prevent any forward movement.

Decommissioning is an important issue to be addressed as part of a negotiations process. But it needs to be removed as an obstacle so that it can no longer be employed to block the negotiations, now or in the future.

I acknowledge similarly the broadly positive comments on confidence building. Progress requires that such words herald the implementation of relevant deeds. Martin McGuinness would have raised these issues in order to get substance and detail of what is meant by the broad commitment on these issues as stated in paragraphs 19 and 20 of the Framework Document which was published more than two years ago. Martin would have requested clarity on how the British government intend to respond to the suggestions by the International Body for action on prisoners, emergency legislation, licensed weapons, plastic bullets, policing and social and economic issues.

We would also have sought clarity on the equality agenda - matters which require no negotiations and we would have suggested that the British government seek to build confidence in the process itself through measures such as:

1. Equality of treatment for Sinn Fein and the Sinn Fein electorate.
2. The need for urgent action on the issue of prisoners and prison related issues. (You are aware of our detailed view on these matters so I will not repeat them now.)
3. Equality of treatment for the Irish culture and identity including education through the medium of Irish.
4. British government handling of contentious marches.

This is without prejudice to the need for action on a range of other democratic, equality and justice issues in the broader programme of change which is

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required. As our delegation said at their last meeting with your representatives, it was our intention to come back with a view on all these issues of equality and hopefully we will yet find some way to do this.

Finally I note that a timeframe of May 98 has been stated in your Aide Memoire. This is a positive step but no calendar or agenda has been provided and I am sure you appreciate that one will be necessary. Martin McGuinness would have asked for this so I would appreciate a copy of your proposed calendar and agenda.

There is a commitment to regular reviews. This is good. What review mechanism will be used? On what date in September will the negotiation of the substantive issues commence?

The Aide Memoire states that 'Ministerial meetings with Sinn Fein would be possible, as well as bilateral and other meetings' in the event of an unequivocal ceasefire by the IRA. We are concerned to know, therefore, when British government ministers will meet with Sinn Fein?

Martin McGuinness would have asked when you will meet with me.

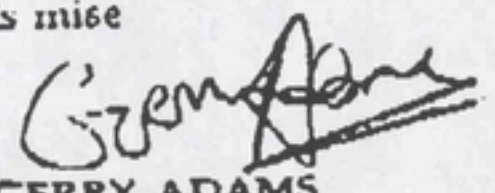
When will the Independent Chairman meet with Sinn Fein?

What is the calendar for these meetings?

In conclusion, I hope that these matters can be cleared up without further delay.

I look forward to hearing from you.

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GERRY ADAMS

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