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THE PRIME MINISTER

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

DRAFT

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I am sorry we will not be able to meet tomorrow morning, as I had originally wanted. I look forward nevertheless to speaking to you later.

Because we cannot meet, it may be helpful to set out on paper where we stand in our efforts to move forward to a settlement, following the appalling murders of the two police officers in Lurgan on Monday. As you know, I am absolutely determined to make rapid progress towards a political solution. I have also been keen to make one more effort to bring Sinn Fein into the process, given the debilitating effect their absence, and continued IRA violence, has on the talks while the possibility of their entry at some early stage remains.

That was why I authorised officials to meet Sinn Fein. The two meetings to remove any misunderstandings on either side were helpful up to a point. But I judged at the end of last week that the time had come to set out our position in clear and concise terms, to remove any shred of doubt or excuse about our intentions. I therefore sent them an aide memoire, a copy of which I enclose.

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Most of the aide memoire deals with familiar issues such as decommissioning, confidence-building measures, and a timescale for the talks. But it also says that, if there were an IRA ceasefire which we judged to be satisfactory in word and deed, Sinn Fein would be formally invited to join the talks some six weeks after its declaration in order to declare their formal commitment to the Mitchell principles. They would then be in a position to join the substantive political talks which I am determined should get under way as soon as possible after the summer break. In other words, they would not be in real discussions until September.

The aim of this was to leave Sinn Fein no excuse whatsoever for prevarication or delay, and to ensure that the full weight of US, Irish and nationalist opinion should be brought to bear on Sinn Fein to declare a ceasefire; and if they did not, in favour of the talks moving on without them.

You can imagine my reaction when I heard of Monday's murders. Whatever the motives – and I was tempted to suspect the worst – I was disgusted and outraged by such an evil apparent response to the paper we had given Sinn Fein.

I am not withdrawing the aide memoire. No-one should be given the slightest excuse for refusing to face up to their full responsibilities. But I propose to make crystal clear in a statement to the House this afternoon that Sinn Fein must now put up or shut up. If it is the former, they will have a huge amount to do to convince us that a new ceasefire is to be taken seriously. If it is the latter, I will have no hesitation in pushing on without them, as we have discussed. I will

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be making clear to John Hume, too, when I see him tomorrow that this is my intention.

As I have told you, I am not going to be shifted from my determination to get the peace train moving rapidly in September, whatever Sinn Fein may or may not do. They have their chance. If they miss it, too bad. I am counting on your help to make this strategy work.

I look forward to discussing this with you.

David Trimble Esq MP