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SINN FEIN: NEXT STEPS

Briefing Points for use with the Irish, Americans, etc

- Prime Minister announced in 16 May speech that he was "ready to make **one further effort** to proceed with the inclusive talks process".
- The Government wants Sinn Fein in the talks but, if they do not want to join, the **settlement train is leaving anyway**.
- The Prime Minister authorised officials to meet Sinn Fein "to explain our position and to assess whether the Republican movement genuinely is ready to give up violence and commit itself to politics alone".
- **HMG wants Sinn Fein in, but cannot wait indefinitely** for them to make up their minds, otherwise the talks will fail.
- Two meetings with officials have taken place (21 and 28 May). Offered **clarification** on the four points which Sinn Fein have long said are the key, based on their 10 October draft statement.
- No question of negotiating a ceasefire but, under instructions, officials took positions which were as good as, if not better than, what Sinn Fein were looking for on three of the four points:
 - timeframe for talks - Sinn Fein wanted reassurance that the talks would take place within a defined timeframe; we have told them that we do not expect the talks to go on beyond May 1998 when the Forum legislation expires.
 - confidence building measures - Sinn Fein wanted assurances that we would take measures to reflect the principles of equality of opportunity, equity of treatment and parative esteem. We have announced a programme of specific measures including incorporation of ECHR, reform of policing arrangements and full implementation of North Report.
 - decommissioning - Sinn Fein wanted assurances that decommissioning would not be a precondition to entry into talks or be allowed to block progress. We have told them that we are actively considering ways, with the Irish Government, in which the issue could be dealt with to the satisfaction of all the

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participants, based on implementation of the Mitchell report in all its aspects, and in a way which does not block the negotiations.

2. On the fourth issue, timing of Sinn Fein's entry to talks, Sinn Fein have argued for immediate entry after a ceasefire. We have told them that this is not on but that, unlike the previous Government, we are **prepared to offer a fixed date within a short timescale**. Thus, **an IRA ceasefire in mid June**, reflected in words and deeds, could lead to Sinn Fein joining the talks before the **end of July**.
3. This is a fair and reasonable offer to Sinn Fein. We cannot give them immediate entry to talks but have offered them rapid entry at a fixed point; on the other issues we have **matched their requirements or exceeded them**. On this basis there is no justification whatsoever for the IRA not calling a **new ceasefire**.
4. Essential that we draw a line under this as soon as possible. Concerned that IRA activity is already beginning to re-emerge. Must do everything we can to reduce tensions during the summer period.
5. We therefore intend to send the aide memoire to Sinn Fein at the **end of this week** to put our position formally on the record. There must be **no misunderstandings**. We then want to hear their answer.
6. Prepared to authorise **one further meeting** with officials, probably next Tuesday, to ensure that there are no misunderstandings about the paper. The meeting would be **subject to events on the ground; no negotiation**.
7. After that meeting, and having briefed key political figures and others, the Prime Minister would then make a **public statement** (on Thursday).

To the Irish and Americans

8. Hope we can count on your support. This is a fair and reasonable offer.
9. We are taking a risk that we may upset the Unionists; they may feel we are doing too much to bring Sinn Fein into talks. If Unionists react badly, could be a price in terms of greater tensions in parades and marches.

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10. But certain that we must put Sinn Fein to the test now; must try to head off return to greater IRA violence. Difficult to know whether the offer will do the trick; intentions of IRA/Sinn Fein are uncertain. But confident we have met their concerns on 10 October; no reason to delay. Need to sort out whether they are in or out of talks, to preserve the process.

11. Please treat the aide memoire in confidence: we want to be able to deliver it with Sinn Fein in our own time and in our own way. Hope you will support us both on the six week period and the notion that the talks must go on in September whether or not Sinn Fein join in. Crucial that the other democratic parties are not penalised by Sinn Fein's failure to join the process.

12. (To the Irish: if we are to make progress down the talks agenda, crucial that we resolve decommissioning. Hope we can agree a joint approach at the earliest possible moment.)