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ANNEX A

GUIDELINES FOR CONTACT WITH SINN FÉIN

In the absence of an IRA ceasefire, contact between Sinn Féin and Government Ministers and officials will be as follows:

- (a) Ministers will not meet with a Sinn Féin elected member or an exclusively Sinn Féin delegation in any circumstances nor will they meet, on Government property, a delegation or group which includes Sinn Féin representatives. This reduces the permitted Ministerial contact which Sinn Féin enjoyed during the ceasefire period. The denial of Ministerial contact with Sinn Féin as a party is in line with the current policy of the Irish Government.
- (b) Ministers will continue their outside visits in Northern Ireland and Great Britain on the understanding that any contacts with Sinn Féin will be incidental to the primary purpose of the visit. For example, visits to District Councils in Northern Ireland will proceed, given that their main purpose is to discuss Council business rather than meet Sinn Féin as a party; social contact with Sinn Féin as a party is avoided.
- (c) Meetings between Sinn Féin and senior officials to discuss policy issues may take place with the explicit approval of the appropriate Departmental Minister. In cases of doubt, advice should be sought from Constitutional and Political Division of the NIO in London (0171 210 6575).

Ministerial approval is necessary because Ministers have to be accountable to Parliament and able to confirm that they gave their agreement to such meetings. This approval

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could be generic or cover a series of meetings in appropriate circumstances.

Every case for consideration, either a specific meeting or a series, should be regarded on its merits with no pre-disposition either for or against.

- (d) Contact between Sinn Féin and junior officials on purely constituency matters will continue as before to avoid any accusation of disenfranchising the electorate in West Belfast and mid-Ulster.
- (e) Sinn Féin should continue to receive Press Notices and other material sent to all political parties in Northern Ireland. Letters signed by Ministers intended to go to all parties or party leaders should receive a Private Secretary signature in the case of Sinn Féin.
- (f) In order to be consistent in treatment between contacts by letter and personal contacts, Departments should ensure that letters from Sinn Féin elected representatives, party officers and unelected spokespersons addressed to Ministers receive a Private Secretary or official and not a Ministerial reply.

Northern Ireland Office  
30 May 1997

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