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GERRY ADAMS NP
SINN FEIN
PRESIDENT

2 July 1997

Quentin Thomas
Northern Ireland Office
Whitehall
London

A Chara

Twelve days ago, on June 20, Gerry Adams wrote to Tony Blair. The letter was instanced by the British government's cancellation of a meeting between British government representatives and Sinn Fein representatives following the killing by the IRA of the two RUC officers in Lurgan. A response, as yet, has not been forthcoming.

The letter was specifically in response to the Aide Memoire sent to us by you on 13 June and the suggestion in your cover note that such a meeting could be used to go through the Aide Memoire and clarify any further points on either side. The letter accordingly sought to clarify a number of points.

On Monday Gerry Adams was told by John Hume that the Secretary of State, Marjorie Mowlam, has authorised you to provide clarification in writing if requested. In a genuine attempt to move the situation forward and to avoid any further unnecessary delay in gaining a response to the matters raised by Gerry Adams in the letter to the Prime Minister twelve days ago, I am doing so.

Let me first of all reiterate that Sinn Fein comes very positively to the Aide Memoire. I restate, as I am sure you will agree, and as your cover note to the Aide Memoire infers, that absolute clarity on this document is required.

In the intervening period the two governments have agreed the *Resolving The Address To Decommissioning* document and the Prime Minister, in a speech, last Wednesday in Westminster provided the British government perspective on the various issues we have been discussing. In his answers to questions in the British House of Commons that day, the Prime Minister provided elaboration on these points. These answers caused the specific concern that a demand for actual decommissioning during the negotiations can be turned into a block on, and precondition to, further progress in the negotiations. This obviously needs to be avoided. The issue needs to be addressed without blocking the negotiations. There is also concern in relation to the British government view of a settlement.

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In this letter I will therefore attempt to outline all the areas on which clarity is required.

1) The Obstacle of Decommissioning.

Of all the obstacles erected by the last government that of decommissioning has been the most destructive. It undermined the peace process and caused its collapse. Since 10 June last year the Unionists have used the decommissioning issue as an obstacle 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 note the commitment by the two governments, in paragraph 3 of *Resolving The Address to Decommissioning*, 'to carry the process forward with energy and determination so as to build confidence without blocking the negotiations'. Does this mean that the British government is committed to carry the process forward without allowing the negotiations to be blocked?

2) Confidence Building

I have acknowledged the broadly positive comments on confidence building. Progress requires that such words herald the implementation of relevant deeds.

The 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, published more than two years ago, is necessary.

There is also a need for 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.

Clarity is also required on the equality agenda. These are matters which require no negotiation 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 required. As our delegation said at our last meeting with you, 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.

3) Timeframe

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.

Would you therefore send me a copy of your proposed calendar and agenda?

4) Sinn Fein's entry into talks

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 would like assurances that this will be acted on without delay.

Will British government ministers meet with Sinn Fein immediately and on the basis of equality with all other parties?

Will the Prime Minister meet immediately with the Sinn Fein President, Gerry Adams, and on the basis of equality with the leaders of all other parties?

Will the Independent Chairman meet with Sinn Fein immediately and on the basis of equality with all other parties?

Can you supply me with a calendar for these meetings?

5) Perspectives of a Political Settlement.

In any process of negotiations Sinn Fein will be promoting and arguing for Irish national reunification, independence and sovereignty as the basis of a democratic, equitable and lasting peace settlement. This is our perspective of a political settlement.

More than two years ago the British and Irish governments agreed the 'Joint Framework for Agreement'. The new British government appears to be moving away from the Framework Document. This received no mention in any of the speeches on Ireland made by the British Prime Minister.

Does this British government remain committed to the 'Joint Framework for Agreement' agreed by the Irish and British governments?

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

I look forward to hearing from you.

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Suibhne O'Donovan

if Martin Mc Guinness