

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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*faxed?*

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*Mr A to see too,  
+ file JH 12/6.*

11 June 1997

*Dear John,*

**ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT: SINN FEIN**

You will wish to know that my Secretary of State has recently approved guidance on contact between Government Ministers and officials and Sinn Féin representatives, in the absence of an IRA ceasefire. Sinn Féin's successes in the General Election may give rise to an increase in the number of occasions on which Sinn Féin representatives seek to raise issues with Departments, at Ministerial or official level. It would be helpful if Whitehall Departments could follow an approach consistent with our own.

A copy of the guidance concerned is attached at Annex A and I would be grateful if Private Secretaries could arrange for it to be disseminated, as appropriate, within their Departments.

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Points to Note

Some particular points to note are:

- (a) the denial of Ministerial contact with Sinn Féin and the limits placed on official contact in the absence of an IRA ceasefire is fully justified and reflects the practice of the previous Government and of the Labour party when in Opposition. However, it is important to give due weight to Sinn Féin's genuine electoral mandate and to prevent accusations that its electorate has been disenfranchised. Constituency issues raised by Sinn Féin representatives should therefore continue to be handled courteously and effectively within the limits of the attached guidance;
- (b) the fact that Messrs Adams and McGuinness were elected to Westminster need not affect the principle behind the guidance. It does, however, undoubtedly increase the range of constituency business which they could legitimately expect to have dealt with, including by Whitehall Departments, and the range of issues on which it might be appropriate to authorise meetings with senior officials to discuss "policy" questions;

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- (c) the guidance suggests that Ministers should not personally sign letters to Sinn Fein representatives.

As the guidance indicates (see paragraph (c)) in cases of doubt, advice can be obtained from the Constitutional and Political Division of the Northern Ireland Office (0171 210 6575/76).

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries of Cabinet members and to Jan Polley in Sir Robin Butler's office.

*Yours ever,*

*Ken*

W K LINDSAY

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