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CONVERSATION WITH THE TAOISEACH

OUTLINE SPEAKING NOTES

1. Matters coming to a head. Determined that negotiations will start on 15 September. A real prospect that they will be fully inclusive, but many difficulties yet to overcome. The two Governments must continue to work closely together.
2. Sinn Féin has now been formally invited to nominate a negotiating team under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations) Act. Very significant positive move. Grateful for your contribution and that of your colleagues and officials.
3. Best way of consolidating the ceasefire and moving towards permanent peace is through a fully inclusive and meaningful negotiating process. We must find ways to bind the UUP in, especially over the next few days which are bound to be difficult for them.
4. Difficult meeting with Trimble on Thursday. He remains under very considerable pressure, including from within his own party, to take a hard line against participation in negotiations with Sinn Féin. (Even Ken Maginnis and Reg Empey have been uncharacteristically negative.) So far Trimble has kept his options open and avoided raising any new preconditions, but next week will be crucial: UUP Executive Committee meets on 6 September to finalise its approach to the negotiations.
5. We have of course pointed to the potential benefits for Unionists of continued direct engagement in the talks process, and the absence of any risk to their fundamental interests.

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6. I shall be reassuring Trimble on a range of measures he has identified as likely to build confidence in the pro-Union community: a mixed bag - greater accountability for quangos, Somme heritage centre etc. That may help.

Decommissioning

7. Fundamentally, however, he continues to need more cover on decommissioning. The package we put together in July came very close to being sufficient, but:
- we must have a credible Independent Commission appointed before 15 September. The key appointment will be the Chairman and Unionists will be greatly reassured if it is de Chastelain;
 - we need to reassure Trimble that the "16 July" position (decommissioning would be at least theoretically possible from the moment at which the substantive negotiations began) remains in place;
 - we need to provide some assurance that "working to achieve due progress on decommissioning" means that the two Governments will be working to achieve some actual decommissioning during the negotiations.
8. Can we agree on de Chastelain as Chairman of the Independent Commission? UUP will find it politically very difficult to support Senator Mitchell as Chair of Strand 2. De Chastelain could retain that role [or "resign" so that, under the Rules of Procedure, Holkeri would take it on as "alternate".]

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9. Pleased with efforts made by officials on both sides to fulfil the commitment to establish the Independent Commission on a full operational basis by 15 September. Crucial to be able to tell Trimble that:

"Security experts in both jurisdictions have made preparations to brief the Commission so that options for draft schemes for decommissioning, in conformity with the Mitchell Report and the Independent Commission's terms of reference, may be available for discussion with all the participants from 15 September".

10. On the third point, could we agree to say:

"The two Governments believe that it would be a major contribution to the development of the necessary mutual confidence and momentum towards agreement, if, as progress is made on political issues, some illegal arms were to be decommissioned during the negotiations, on a mutual basis, by Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries".

Consent

11. Additionally it will significantly strengthen the hand of those in the UUP arguing for constructive participation in the talks if both Governments [or at least HMG] could reiterate their position on the principle of consent, without of course seeking to bind other participants. I propose:

"In their approach to the negotiations the two Governments remain committed to the principles - including the principle of consent - set out in the Downing Street Declaration of

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December 1993. They welcome the widespread support which those principles have received and believe they will stand the test of time and emerge as guiding principles for the political settlement which the negotiations are intended to achieve."

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sds/Ltr Holmes/Conversation with Taoiseach/WKL/HOLMES/29/8