



by fax.  
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Prime Minister

27 August 1997

### THE IRA CEASEFIRE

I have concluded, having considered all the relevant information, that the necessary requirements for Sinn Féin's entry into the negotiations have been met.

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I have considered carefully the evidence of both words and deeds. I met the security force commanders yesterday morning. They confirmed that, since 21 July, IRA operational activity had ceased or was at a very low level - significantly, unlike the last ceasefire, there is little or no evidence of targetings and punishment attacks.

The level of activity is in fact appreciably lower than during the early weeks of the 1994 ceasefire.

Although there can be no guarantee, while the IRA retains its organisation, resources and weapons, that it will not return to violence, I have concluded that the restored IRA ceasefire is unequivocal, and that Sinn Féin have met the requirements of paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Groundrules (i.e. established a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods, and shown that they abide by the democratic process).

Once I consider the requirements to be met, I am obliged by law to issue the necessary invitation to Sinn Féin to nominate their negotiating team. I shall issue this invitation on Thursday and announce my decision at the same time, having briefed key players in other parties in advance. This will be five weeks and four days after the IRA ceasefire took effect. In the aide memoire, we said we would need "some six weeks" to reach the necessary judgement. I shall continue to monitor the situation because, if events after the invitation has issued demonstrate that the legal requirements are no longer met, it can be withdrawn at any point up to 9 September. If such events occur after 9 September when Sinn Féin have made their commitment to the Mitchell principles, this would then be governed by the talks Rules of Procedure.

The considerations I can take into account in reaching this decision are constrained by the statute. The legal background is described in the attached note (Annex A), which reflects the advice of the Law Officers.

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PREM 49/115 Attachment to letter Holmes to the PM 27/08/97

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The Law Officers have still to finally clear the terms of the attached statement announcing my decision (see Annex B).

Sinn Féin will formally enter the negotiations when the Plenary session resumes on 9 September. They will then immediately have to affirm, in front of the Independent Chairmen and the other participants, their total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles of democracy and non violence (Annex C).

With this decision, it follows that Sinn Féin should be treated, in terms of access to Ministers and dealings with Government Departments, on the same basis as other political parties with equivalent electoral support and political representation. More detailed guidance to departments will be issued shortly.

I am copying this to the Members of IN Committee and Sir Robin Butler.

Signed

**MARJORIE MOWLAM**

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