

04-SEP-1997 09:26 FROM 6621019 SEC D/TAOISEACH

TO

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**SUBJECT
MASTER**Top - JEM
✓ JPO
AC**Filed on**Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

4 September, 1997.

The Right Honourable Tony Blair, M.P.,
The Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London.

Dear Tony,

Following on our conversation on Friday last, I reviewed the different suggestions that had been made on wording the two Governments might use on decommissioning and consent and the suggestions that have been made in relation to the chairing of the Independent Commission on Decommissioning and Strand 2 of the talks.

Based on that consideration Paddy Teahon sent John Holmes suggested wording on decommissioning and consent on Monday evening.

I believe the wording on consent is directly in line with the conversation that we had on Friday, stating clearly that the two Governments see consent as a guiding principle for them in the forthcoming negotiations.

On decommissioning I thought it particularly important to set down the essential objective of our two Governments on decommissioning. As I see it this is that we achieve "the complete and permanent" decommissioning of all illegally held paramilitary weapons. Clearly it is important that decommissioning should not become a blockage in the talks and equally that it proceed in a way that builds confidence for all sides. I see it as critical that all parties in the negotiations negotiate in good faith on that basis.

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Oifig an Taoisigh
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I believe that making specific references to actual decommissioning in the course of the negotiations will impair the achieving of the two Governments' essential objective as I have set it out. While we have always supported the Mitchell Compromise approach, that "the parties should consider an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all party negotiations", we cannot pre-empt these negotiations, nor should we give credence to the notion that decommissioning is the central priority issue in the negotiations. I believe it crucial that we do not recreate, within the negotiations, a situation equivalent in its effect to that of the Washington 3 statement for the commencing of the talks process. I would be concerned that such specific references to actual decommissioning would on the one side create major difficulties for Sinn Fein participation in a positive way in the negotiations. It would on the other hand lead to a significant risk that the UUP would be put in the position where it would be hard for them to avoid saying they were not prepared to proceed with political negotiations in the absence of actual decommissioning or at least a commitment that it will happen in the short term. I believe this latter danger is significantly increased because of the pressure the UUP will come under from the DUP and UK UP.

In all these circumstances I believe the most productive approach is to state our Government's essential objective of complete and permanent decommissioning clearly and looking to all parties, in good faith, to negotiate on that basis.

I have no difficulty in stating equally clearly that the continuing objective of our Security Forces is to recover any illegally held paramilitary weapons on an ongoing basis and to say that they have achieved significant success in this work.

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Oifig an Taoisigh
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On the issue of Chairmanship the Irish Government believe that General de Chastelain is extremely well qualified to chair the Independent Commission on Decommissioning. We believe, and I believe this was also essentially your position on Friday, that it would be neither appropriate nor possible for him to discharge this role while continuing in his other role as one of the three Independent Chairmen of the political talks, in particular his proposed Chairmanship of Strand 2 of the talks. We believe therefore that Senator Mitchell should act as Chairman of Strand 2, with Prime Minister Holkeri acting as Alternate Chairman of this Strand.

I thought it important to set down my thinking in arriving at the position we have now reached. I would be happy to discuss it with you. I am prepared to take any step that leads to inclusive and constructive negotiations but I believe it equally important to avoid any step that would in the longer term jeopardise the negotiations or the stability and confidence sustaining the ceasefire, even if it appears to help surmount an immediate difficulty.

Yours sincerely,

Taoiseach

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