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[Reply to Mr Trimble's letter of 30 June, although all the points in that have already been responded to]

DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO:

David Trimble Esq MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

August 1997

We have had several opportunities to discuss the points in your letter of 30 June. You have also discussed them with Mo Mowlam and Paul Murphy, and many of them were dealt with in the clarificatory statement which Paul Murphy made to the plenary session of the multi-party negotiations on 16 July.

Reviewing the current situation against the terms of your letter, however, I believe there may be some value in restating the Government's position on a number of the issues you raise.

In relation to Sinn Féin, I can assure you that the Government is in no doubt about the need for care in dealing with an organisation which, as we have made clear, we believe to be inextricably linked to the IRA. I am in no doubt, however, that it is right to make a genuine effort to enable and encourage the Republican Movement to make the transition to democracy and the use of exclusively peaceful methods. My aim is to defeat terrorism by using the weapons of democracy - dialogue, the defense of positions of principle and the search for consensus - and to show that the political system can accommodate the Republican perspective, provided of course that can be divorced from the use or threat of violence. The use of terrorism needs to be exposed as being irrelevant and counterproductive as well as morally wrong. We want to co-opt Sinn Féin to democracy - on democratic terms.

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So far as Sinn Féin's participation in the negotiations is concerned, Mo Mowlam will be assessing whether the restoration of the IRA ceasefire is indeed unequivocal, and borne out by word and deed. No doubt you will be taking up the opportunity announced by Paul Murphy on 16 July to discuss with him and Mo Mowlam the practical implications of the ceasefire for the negotiations. Both Governments are looking for a total end to politically motivated violence in Northern Ireland, and I am convinced that our present policies offer the best chance of securing that and removing the use or threat of force from political calculations there. As Paul Murphy made clear on 16 July, a resumption of IRA violence during the negotiations would bring into play the procedure for considering representations that a participant had demonstrably dishonoured its commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the report of the International Body, and should therefore be excluded.

Many of the points in your letter were about the mechanisms for achieving the decommissioning of illegal weapons and your concern that there should be no obstacle to the commencement of actual decommissioning from 15 September, when the substantive political negotiations will start. Paul Murphy's clarificatory remarks about the two Governments' proposals on decommissioning, made on 16 July on behalf of both Governments, provided full reassurances on most of the specific points you raised. The problem for you, as I understand it, is that the two Governments' essentially dynamic approach to the achievement of actual decommissioning - which itself reflects the underlying analysis of the Report of the International Body - means that we cannot offer any certainty as to when it will actually commence. The following points may, however, provide some reassurance:

- (a) Sinn Féin's participation in the negotiations would of course require it to affirm its total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the report of the International Body. Those commitments would constitute an unequivocal renunciation of the use or threat of violence to achieve political objectives and incorporate a binding commitment to the total and verifiable disarmament of terrorist organisations. The two Governments will certainly be working to achieve real progress

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- towards that objective alongside progress in the substantive political negotiations. Sinn Féin's affirmation of commitment to the principles would reinforce the moral and political imperatives on the Republican Movement to bring about the earliest possible decommissioning of all illegal weapons;
- (b) the two Governments had of course proposed that participants should also make a series of commitments relevant to decommissioning, including a commitment to "work to achieve the earliest possible decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons". If those proposals had been agreed they would have been binding on any party subsequently invited to join the process;
- (c) those proposals also envisaged that the mechanisms to enable decommissioning to occur would be fully operational from 15 September; and proposed a review mechanism to give all participants regular opportunities to reflect on the pace of progress across the negotiations as a whole and to consider whether the necessary confidence and momentum towards agreement was being sustained;
- (d) [over the summer, the two Governments will be making] [the two Governments have made] all the necessary preparations to establish an Independent Commission, in time for that Commission to commence work on a fully operational basis, on the lines set out in the Governments' joint note to the plenary of 16 July, alongside the start of substantive negotiations on 15 September;
- (e) both Governments have given a firm undertaking that they will immediately give effect to an appropriate scheme for decommissioning whenever any paramilitary organisation is brought to accept the need to commence decommissioning;
- (f) the two Governments have proposed that the Commission should be invited to draw attention to any case in which a participant fails to engage with the

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- Commission in accordance with the proposed commitment to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission in carrying out its role;
- (g) the two Governments have also proposed that the Independent Chairmen as a group should have a role in indicating when progress in particular areas of the negotiations would help to sustain the necessary confidence and momentum towards agreement;
- (h) the two Governments believe that if Sinn Féin were to be invited to join the negotiations it would be a major contribution to the development of the necessary mutual confidence and momentum towards agreement if there were to be some actual IRA decommissioning of illegal weapons during the negotiations.

I hope these points are helpful and that in the light of them you would be ready to support the two Governments' proposals on decommissioning. Mo Mowlam, Paul Murphy and I would be very happy to discuss the issues further if you would find that helpful.

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