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CONFIDENTIAL**Annex B****DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO:**

David Trimble Esq MP
House of Commons
LONDON SW1A 0AA

July 1997

I have been reflecting on our telephone conversation of 22 July.

Although I regret it, I understand why you thought that it would have been politically unwise for you to signal support for the two Governments' decommissioning proposals on 23 July - whatever further clarifications had been available. As it is, the talks process is seen to be continuing despite the "setback" of failure to reach agreement on decommissioning that afternoon. Your handling of the media dovetailed neatly with what Mo Mowlam was able to do.

I am most grateful for the way in which you and your team have remained publicly committed to the talks process and I believe that has provided us all with an important breathing space. We must use that interval wisely to prepare to advance our common objectives.

I had originally intended to send you a draft letter incorporating further clarifications of the two Governments' approach to the negotiations and to the decommissioning issue in particular, but I am now inclined - as you suggested - to defer action on that front until the beginning of September when your position may be stronger. I know Bertie Ahern shares my view of the need to create the circumstances in which the Ulster Unionist Party could play a full part in substantive negotiations from that date and I believe the two Governments can, within the parameters of the firm policy positions reflected in the joint paper of 25 June, make some further movement which should be helpful to you.

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I should, however, still find it very helpful to have a long private chat next week about where the talks are likely to lead, and how we might best approach the substantive political negotiations. John Holmes will be in touch to make the necessary arrangements.

I do very much appreciate the considerable efforts you are making, within the constraints which inevitably bear upon you, to keep the door open to negotiations on the real issues. The Unionist community in Northern Ireland has much to gain from such negotiations, but I do understand that you have a difficult hand to play.

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