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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

24 July 1997

Dee Idun,

NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for your letter of 23 July.

As you know, the Prime Minister attaches great importance to the early establishment of the Independent Commission, and believes we should press the Irish Government as hard as necessary on this subject. He is willing to write and/or speak to Ahern if necessary.

As far as Trimble is concerned, the Prime Minister accepts that it would be better not to send him a draft letter now. But he believes we should continue to signal to Trimble that something more may be possible in September to help tie him in and, hopefully, encourage him to vote for the two Governments' proposals on decommissioning, if and when they are put to a vote again. He proposes to see Trimble privately next Wednesday in the House of Commons, to talk him through this and respond to Trimble's request for a discussion of the shape of a settlement.

In general, the Prime Minister agrees that we need to avoid doing or saying things which are inconsistent with what we have said to the Irish and Sinn Fein. But this is a two-way process. The Irish have almost certainly made promises to Sinn Fein which they have not revealed to us, and Sinn Fein's performance since the ceasefire has been less than helpful. In any case, we need to be sensitive to the concerns of the Unionists, and not just to those of the Nationalists. On a point of detail, have we made "undertakings" to Sinn Fein? I thought we had only offered them clarification.

No doubt we will be in touch further about all this before Wednesday.

Yours ever
John
JOHN HOLMES

John McKervill Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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