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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

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Subject
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filed

21 July 1997

(rel) AG

Dear John,

**TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH THE TAOISEACH,
21 JULY**

The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach spoke on the phone for five minutes around 11 o'clock today. The Prime Minister said that the Unionists were still going at the Government hammer and tongs. But he did not want them to walk out of the talks. If they could not agree to the decommissioning proposals, we would have to return to the issue and try and find some way out for the UUP, despite the hole they were digging for themselves. The Tory press were also being unhelpful. People seemed to have forgotten quickly how much flak the Government had taken from the other side over Drumcree. In any case, his intention remained to move to substantive talks on 15 September, come hell or high water.

Ahern said that the key was to build on the decommissioning proposals and the ceasefire, even if they were not perfect. He and his officials had been going back through the decommissioning proposals, and the draft forms of words we had sent them. They would send us shortly the strongest formulation they could manage, in the hope that would be helpful. No-one wanted to push anyone out of the talks. Equally no-one on the Irish side wanted to see guns still in the equation. Unfortunately, it did not sound from his public comments as if Trimble was in the mood for compromise.

The Prime Minister said that he would be looking to achieve two things from Trimble: that he would not walk out of the talks and that he would accept in principle the possibility of sitting down with Sinn Fein. We would then need to see how to take forward the process, but he repeated that the September to May timetable was critical, with the aim of an agreement at the end of it to put to the

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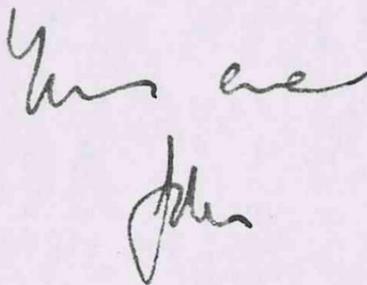
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people. We would have to drive the process along. He promised the Taoiseach a read-out of the Trimble meeting.

I am copying this letter to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), and to Sir John Kerr in Washington and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin by fax.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Holmes', written in a cursive style.

JOHN HOLMES

John McKervill Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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