



10 DOWNING STREET
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1 August 1997

THE PRIME MINISTER

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 23 July. I have discussed some of these issues with David Trimble and I know he has also raised them separately with Mo Mowlam.

Northern Ireland Grand Committee (NIGC)

The Government does intend that the NIGC should be re-established and Mo is currently seeking colleagues' agreement to the number of NIGC meetings and so forth. It is intended that a motion will be put to the House when it resumes in October to give effect to that agreement.

Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee

As you will know, this Committee has now been established and met on 30 July to choose a chairman. It has four Northern Ireland members including two from your own party.

UK Delegation to the Council of Europe

An announcement about make up of this delegation is expected before the House rises. I am well aware of your interest but cannot pre-judge the announcement.

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Gun law

Mo was intending to bring forward legislation this autumn to prohibit on public safety grounds the private ownership of all hand guns, as in Great Britain. Personal protection weapons would, of course, be exempt from the ban until the security situation indicated that the individuals concerned were no longer under threat. However, in recognition of your concerns she is prepared to delay these proposals.

However, I am bound to say that such a delay may give rise to questions about the Government's commitment to public safety standards in Northern Ireland and the danger of ordinary firearms policy being linked to the debate on illegally held firearms. We may, therefore, need to look at this again.

In general, I am grateful for the suggestions in your letter on how to build a positive and confident atmosphere. I am keen that the Unionist community should be clear that I am aware of and sensitive to their concerns. I hope my reply will go some way towards reassuring you on this.

Yours truly
J. D. Taylor

P.s. Enjoy your holiday. As well
deserved!

The Right Honourable John D Taylor MP