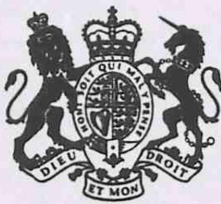


CONFIDENTIAL - PERSONAL**10 DOWNING STREET**
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

31 July 1997

*Dear Gen,***NORTHERN IRELAND**

The Prime Minister briefed William Hague and Andrew Mackay on Northern Ireland this afternoon, following an earlier promise to do so before the summer break. He gave a frank account of where things stood. Hague made clear that he was keen to maintain the bipartisan approach and made little comment on the substance. But he laid particular stress on the importance of actual parallel decommissioning and the triple lock (reflecting his questions in the Commons last week), and also underlined the difficult position of David Trimble – he needed help to stay in the process. The Prime Minister explained how we were trying to help, including over the consent principle.

So far so good. But the link between the UUP and the Conservatives remains strong, and we may have trouble over decommissioning in the autumn.

JOHN HOLMESKen Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office**CONFIDENTIAL - PERSONAL***AS*