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file  
A. Chretien - pps  
cc NIO  
High Comm.  
FCO

THE PRIME MINISTER

2 October 1997

Dear Jean,

As we launch in Belfast the beginning of substantive negotiations on the future of Northern Ireland, I am writing to express my gratitude for your recent support on the complex issue of membership of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning which was finally established on 24 September. The Commission is now ready to begin work alongside the substantive negotiations. It marks an important step in our objective to bring about an enduring political settlement in Northern Ireland by May next year. As before, we have found we can rely on you to give generous and speedy assistance. I am most grateful.

I am delighted that General de Chastelain has been appointed as Chairman of the Commission. There is no doubt that his expertise in this field, coupled with the breadth of his experience and understanding of Northern Ireland issues, will be of immense benefit to the Commission and to the talks process as a whole. The fact that we have reached this unprecedented stage in the peace process is already in no small part due to his excellent work along with the other international chairmen.

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I am sorry that the appointment of General de Chastelain has meant that we have had to stand down Lt-General Dangerfield. I have no doubt that he would also have made an excellent member of the Commission. General Dangerfield himself, and the Canadian officials involved, showed great understanding while we sought to resolve the complex and delicate issues surrounding the membership of the Commission and General de Chastelain's role. For our part, the knowledge that we had such an excellent contingency candidate waiting in the wings helped us to be confident – and, more importantly, to reassure those less confident – that a credible Commission would be able to be set up. I would be most grateful if my sincere thanks could be passed to General Dangerfield; I understand that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will also be writing to him.

The coming months will be crucial ones for Northern Ireland. I know we can count on your continuing support for our efforts to reach a lasting settlement. Thank you for the practical support you have given us so far.

Yours ever  
Tony

The Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien PC QC MP