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From: John Holmes
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PRIME MINISTER**VISIT TO NORTHERN IRELAND**

As I mentioned to you on the phone, the NIO have made a complete dog's breakfast of the programme for Monday. I attach it as it stands. As you can see, it has got longer rather than shorter, as we intended. It includes no events with the public, for pictures, until right at the end. And, most important, it involves you in an absurd series of back-to-back meetings with all the Talks parties, as well as saying hello to the Talks staff and even Irish officials. The parties get 10 minutes each, including Sinn Fein.

I told Mo's office this evening that I thought this was ridiculous, and not at all what I had agreed with John Chilcot. They have spoken to Mo, who is unyielding that this is how it must be done. She believes that you cannot pick and choose between the parties once you are in Castle Buildings, without causing huge offence. Leaving Irish officials out seems needlessly rude, and the Talks staff have worked long and hard to get the Talks off the ground etc. Moreover, the visit is now set up and the arrangements cannot be undone without huge trouble. I have repeated that I do not think the arrangements will do as they stand. They are inhuman in what they expect of you, are bound to overrun, and give you only 10 minutes with Sinn Fein, which is too short for any worthwhile exchange. I have said that I will consult you overnight and will be in touch with them again tomorrow.

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Perhaps we could have a word in the morning to see how strongly you feel. I think you will need to talk to Mo. The real difficulty is unscrambling what has already been set up without creating a huge story. Otherwise, we could probably find ways of grouping the smaller parties and cutting down some of the more obvious nonsenses, eg 15 minutes with Talks staff. We may still be able to do a bit of that, but I fear not much unless Mo is prepared to back off.

The other option is to call off the visit, pleading urgent business in London, and set up a better visit for later. But this will look thin unless there is an obvious reason, given that a lot of people in Belfast now more or less know you are coming. You may be accused of funking Adams at the last minute. Nevertheless, threatening to cancel the visit may be a way of focussing Mo's mind on the need for change.

For the record, what I had in mind (after we had discussed this) was seeing Hume and Trimble in their constituencies, meeting Adams in Castle Buildings, together with Alderdice for cover, and seeing Peter Robinson in his constituency.

This last-minute difficulty has been partly caused by the late change of plan, and compounded by the usual difficulty of dealing with these programmes given the security classification.

I also attach a bit of background briefing on the events other than Castle Buildings. But we can go through this on the plane over on Monday morning.

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