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File
 19/9

Marjorie Mowlam MP
 Northern Ireland Office
 Stormont Castle
 Belfast BT4 3JF

Dear Secretary of State

I thought it might be helpful to review where we are at the moment.

You will have seen my comments yesterday welcoming the Government's recent statements that consent will be the guiding principle in the negotiations.

May I underline the point I made during meetings with the Prime Minister in July and again earlier this month, that I understand the above statement to mean that there will be a genuine process of negotiation; that there will be no repetition of the events in June and July. Then we were presented with a joint governmental position, prepared without any genuine consultation with us, and told that it was not open to negotiation. As I said to you in July, any attempt to repeat that conduct will be fatal to progress in the talks.

You will have noted the comment in my statement yesterday that we are focusing on the format and the agenda for substantive talks. Unfortunately our discussions yesterday with the Minister of State, Paul Murphy MP, and Senator Mitchell, failed to elicit any useful information. Can I underline that progress on these issues is crucial to us. We recognise that strictly speaking these are matters for the participants in the talks as a whole to determine. But the government is aware of our concerns on these matters and we would appreciate greater clarity as to the government's position with regard to these concerns.

Yesterday's statement did not specifically mention decommissioning: not because the resolution of the issue is not important: it is indeed indispensable: but I expected yesterday morning that it would be easy to find an appropriate form of words to embody what I thought we were agreed on. I am surprised by the delay and concerned at the developments on the chairmanship I discussed with John Holmes last night.

Leader of the Party: DAVID TRIMBLE, MP
 Patron: THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD MOLYNEUX OF KILLEAD, KBE
 President: LORD LUNNINHAM, DL MA General Secretary: JIM WILSON

The presence at Castle Buildings yesterday of relatives of some victims of terrorism is a reminder of the hurt that will be caused by the posturing of those responsible for their loss. This is a very sensitive issue and the Northern Ireland Office must show to the public that it is following up the Prime Minister's promise to mark the sacrifices made in service of the community and help the bereaved and suffering as a matter of the utmost urgency.

Turning to the list of confidence building measures given to you on 31 July, I am pleased to note the progress announced on education funding and local government. I hope these announcements will be followed up as soon as possible.

We also welcome the Prime Minister's comments on Police and Firearms legislation. In respect of the latter I think his comment at our meeting last Wednesday that the simplest thing to do was simply to say that Northern Ireland is different on this matter and the post Dunblane legislation will not be applied is the best thing to do.

There are two matters on which there appeared to be agreement at our meeting with the Prime Minister last Wednesday, namely greater openness in the operation of the inter-governmental conference and secretariat (pending its removal), and a review of funding for community and cultural development with particular reference to access from, and fair treatment of, the protestant community. I hope you can inform us of progress on these matters.

The response by Paul Murphy MP on 2 September to my memo of 31 July mentioned the current position on quangos, fair employment and parades. May I underline the point that the whole point of the exercise is to build public confidence, particularly among the pro-union people that this government is aware of their concerns and will deal fairly with them. That confidence does not exist at present, and will not be created by private briefings. We find the absence of confidence in this administration to be a seriously inhibiting factor. So I hope you can assure us that there will be early public action on these issues.

Sincerely

David Trimble

David Trimble MP