

DRAFT LETTER FROM PM TO PRESIDENT AHTISAARI

As we launch ~~{next week/today}~~ in Belfast the beginning of substantive negotiations on the future of Northern Ireland, I am writing to express my ~~personal~~ gratitude for your recent support in providing us with Brigadier-General Nieminen as a member of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, ~~which was~~ formally established on 24 September. We are most grateful to Brigadier-General Nieminen for agreeing to take on this challenging ~~and~~ important role. The Commission is now ready to begin work ~~on~~ a full operational basis alongside the substantive negotiations. It marks an important ~~and historic~~ 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.

The fact that we have reached this unprecedented stage in the peace process is also in no small part due to the excellent work of Harri Holkeri who, along with the other international chairmen, has ^{earned} ~~achieved~~ the well-deserved respect of all parties in the talks process.

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 ~~just conclusion~~ lasting settlement.

I look forward to seeing you in London in November.