

DRAFT LETTER FROM PM TO PRESIDENT CLINTON

I am pleased to say that in the past couple of weeks we have made ~~some vital~~ progress in Northern Ireland. As you will have heard, Sinn Fein have joined the talks and sworn their commitment to the Mitchell principles; we have kept the Ulster Unionists in play - though only just; we succeeded in finding a ^{moderated} way through the decommissioning problem ^{for now} and ultimately got agreement to move, at last, into the substantive talks.

This is all ~~very~~ good news. Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists and one of the other smaller unionist parties have withdrawn from the discussions but otherwise the pieces are now in place for us to press on with the real negotiations. As always, part of the credit must go to George Mitchell and the other independent chairmen who have skilfully helped to guide the parties round the obstacles.

I also want you to know how grateful I am ^{to you} for providing ~~us~~ with Ambassador Donald Johnston as a member of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, which was formally established on 24 September. We are most ^{and} grateful to Ambassador Johnson for agreeing to take on this challenging ~~and important~~ role. The Commission is now ready to commence work ~~on a full operational basis~~ on decommissioning 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.

can look
to you
for help
on this.
I look
forward
to having
it done
soon.

Both communities will need constant
encouragement to reach the point of the
difficulties so painstakingly created. I know!

As for the Talks, there is clearly a long and potentially turbulent negotiation ahead. Sinn Fein show every sign of wanting to play a full part. They will continue to come under pressure on decommissioning and their attitude to the principle of consent - they are the only party that reject the right of Northern Ireland's people to determine their own future.

David Trimble's Ulster Unionists have rejoined the negotiations, saying that they are determined to confront Sinn Fein and not let the Union go undefended whilst, at the same time, showing little appetite as yet for engaging Sinn Fein in direct argument.

John Hume, who was becoming increasingly concerned about what he saw as unionist foot-dragging, ended up playing a crucial role in the deal that moved us into substantive negotiations. ~~That deal would also have been impossible without flexibility from Bertie Ahern.~~

I hope that Washington will keep its own channels open with the main players. ~~We can both play an important part in encouraging both the Unionists and Sinn Fein to make the most of the opportunity that has now been painstakingly created.~~ *Communities need constant*

The message we now need to get home to the unionists is that, once the negotiations begin, they can expect understanding and support as a meaningful and proper engagement with all the nationalist representatives, including Sinn Fein, begins. As for Sinn Fein themselves, we expect them to exert strong pressure on the whole of the Republican movement to abide by the Mitchell principles. Any more attacks like the one at Markethill could seriously destabilise the process. They

We and the UK must work well together. I was most grateful for Bertie Ahern's help in recent weeks.

will also need support since, as the negotiations move forward, they must also prepare themselves to shift their ground on consent, partition and other areas of vital political sensitivity.

I hope we too can keep in close touch.