

DRAFT LETTER FROM PM TO PRIME MINISTER CHRETIEN

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 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 ~~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.

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 ~~the~~ <sup>his</sup> excellent work of General de Chastelain ~~who~~, along with the other international chairmen, has ~~earned the~~ <sup>earned</sup> ~~achieved the well-deserved respect of all parties in the~~ ~~talks process.~~

I am ~~conscious~~ <sup>sorry</sup> 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~~ <sup>great</sup> ~~immeasurable forbearance and~~ understanding while we sought to resolve the complex and delicate issues surrounding the



membership of the Commission and General De Chastelain's role .  
~~at the talks.~~ For our part, the knowledge that we had such  
 an excellent contingency candidate waiting in the wings ~~in~~  
~~itself made a great difference to us.~~ It <sup>helped</sup> enabled 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 ~~personally.~~

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.~~ <sup>lasting settlement.</sup> Thank you for the  
 practical support you have given us so far.