



Minister of State

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Dear David

You asked about the reference, in the paper we circulated on constitutional issues, to the British Government standing by "all the commitments and proposals" set out in paragraphs 14-21 of A New Framework for Agreement.

The status of the Framework document is well known. It reflects a shared understanding between the two Governments on the parameters of a possible outcome. Both Governments offer it for consideration as such, not as a rigid blueprint to be imposed. As the Prime Minister said in his speech in Belfast in May, we believe it sets out a reasonable basis for negotiation. But the primary objective of both Governments is to promote and establish agreement. No outcome is either predetermined or excluded in advance.

A balanced accommodation on the constitutional issues is an essential element of an overall settlement. As you know we approach this on the basis of the Government's fundamental commitment to the principle of consent. That fundamental commitment underpins the approach of both Governments described in paragraphs 14-21 of A New Framework for Agreement. That passage reflects a careful and balanced accommodation, incorporating the two Governments' joint commitment to the principles of self-determination and consent to an overall accommodation which is such as to secure the consent of both unionists and nationalists and to amending



their respective constitutional legislation so as to fully reflect these fundamental principles and commitments.

Paragraph 20 sets out the British Government's approach to its responsibilities in Northern Ireland. Similarly, paragraph 21 sets out the Irish Government's commitment, as part of an overall agreement, to introduce and support proposals for changes in the Irish Constitution which will fully reflect the principle of consent in Northern Ireland. We attach particular importance to this commitment by the Irish Government. As the Prime Minister said in his speech in Belfast in May, it must be part of a settlement and would be a helpful confidence-building step in advance of it.

Yours ever,
Paul

PAUL MURPHY MP

MINISTER OF STATE

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