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Prime Minister

MAJOR EVENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

This minute seeks your help and summarises the steps being taken to ensure a number of major events are held in Northern Ireland. These will be designed to:- assist in creating a positive, vibrant mood; help in building greater community self-confidence and self-esteem; bring the different parts of the community together; enable the area to present a more attractive image to the rest of the world; and thus help to create a better atmosphere in which to seek a sustainable political settlement.

Even during the very worst periods of the troubles the entertainment industry has continued in Northern Ireland. We can build on this, particularly with experienced local promoters who have good linkages with major UK promoters such as Harvey Goldsmith, with whom I have spoken. For example, the annual Belfast Festival at Queen's University which will, from 14-30 November, attract around 100,000 people to some 300 performances of all kinds; the new Belfast Waterfront Hall is attracting major conferences as well as a wide programme of musical events; the British Seniors Golf Championship, held at Portrush for the last 3 years has enjoyed worldwide television coverage; and a U2 concert this summer played to a crowd of 30,000 in Belfast's Botanic Gardens.

The next phase

We have set up a company to pursue a 5 to 10 years strategy for attracting major events which bring the two sides of the community together to present a better image of Northern Ireland to the rest of the world. Developments include the



selection of the playing fields at Stormont as a future venue for Ireland's international cricket matches and some tentative discussions about the possible relocation of a Premier League football team to Belfast.

I am particularly keen that we encourage events which appeal to young people from both sides of the community. It is likely that another major open air concert will be held next summer in Botanic Gardens. I am encouraging the use of the Stormont Estate as a possible venue for popular open air concerts and for indoor classical music events; this is part of wider plans to re-image Stormont. Other publicly owned venues are being considered and we are seeking to expand the colourful Belfast Carnival.

Proposed Action

While local promoters have their direct links with the top popular artists, I think we could help by using our contacts to encourage people like Elton John and groups like Oasis to perform in Belfast over the next year. The proposed tribute event for Princess Diana being planned by Richard Branson could also provide an excellent opportunity to feature Belfast and Northern Ireland performers in an event which will secure a worldwide audience. A personal approach by you to Elton John might well secure the necessary agreement in principle.

We are also working with the television companies to exploit opportunities for national and international coverage of sporting and cultural events in Northern Ireland. Following some earlier discussions, BBC(NI) are shortly to launch a special event called 'Making a Difference' which will culminate in a 5-hour programme on BBC1 and BBC2 in Northern Ireland on Friday 13 February. This will include a televised event in Belfast's Opera House which I will be attending and will be helpful



in raising self esteem and in celebrating the good side of life in Northern Ireland. The BBC would welcome assistance in persuading well known people to participate, either in person or on video. An approach is being made to President Clinton and I would be grateful if you could do a one minute video contribution and encourage him to do the same. It would be helpful if you were able to use your good offices to encourage other well known personalities to contribute. I would be happy to provide names.

Margaret

MM