



From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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cc PH  
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John Holmes Esq  
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
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19 November 1997

Dear John

**NORTHERN IRELAND: MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH ON  
FRIDAY 21 NOVEMBER 1997**

1. The purpose of this letter is to provide briefing for the Prime Ministers meeting with the Taoiseach on Friday 21 November. I have also taken the opportunity to respond to your letter of 17 November to Ken Lindsay.

**Talks**

2. One of the most important keys to progress in the multi party negotiations is the development of a positive relationship between the UUP and the Irish Government, leading to the creation of the necessary mutual confidence that UUP agreement to significant North/South arrangements would be matched with Irish commitment to amend Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution and a readiness to develop broader East/West institutional architecture. The Irish were very excited by their meeting with the UUP on Monday and felt there was a real prospect of doing a deal. They are looking forward expectantly to Mr Ahern's meeting with the UUP on Thursday.
3. The Prime Minister's meeting with the Taoiseach offers a useful early opportunity to assess the outcome of that meeting and, if necessary to

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- encourage the Irish to commit themselves on Articles 2 and 3 and develop their thinking on East/West institutional architecture (perhaps on the lines of the paper we gave them last week, building on UUP proposals); or
- agree to press the UUP to be more forthcoming on North/South arrangements.

u . More generally the two Prime Ministers might review the overall state of the negotiations, which need to demonstrate some real forward movement by Christmas if they are not to lose credibility with both Unionists and Republicans. Given the inter-relationship of the various issues and the need for multi-lateral mutual compromises across the various strands, we need to create circumstances in which all the parties accept the key compromises simultaneously. Senator Mitchell's suggestion that each party should let him have before the end of the month a written summary of the key issues in the negotiation may offer a way forward. If he can present the parties' positions in a structured way it could help the forthcoming review plenary to identify the half dozen key components of a deal.

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6. With this in mind, Paddy Teahon's comment that the ceasefire is not at immediate risk, but that there will be continuing pressure on the Sinn Féin leadership, seems to us about right. The suggestion that both Governments need to do more to help Sinn Féin on prisoners also seems to us to reflect a genuine concern that Sinn Féin needs support to keep the peace going.
4. Paddy Teahon focused on the issue of prisoners but there, of course, other ways of supporting Sinn Féin in particular and nationalist opinion in general. More than anything Adams and McGuinness need to be able to show their

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followers that there is real progress in the talks; but the UUP's lack of direct engagement with the process as a whole, and with them in particular, them is making that impossible. In fact all the parties have been reluctant to show their hands, while expecting others to do so. The Irish Government's meeting with the UUP earlier this week, which David Andrews thought was extremely good, should allow Dublin to send some encouraging signals to Sinn Féin about the UUP, but unless and until the Unionists engage more purposefully in the process, including eventually with Sinn Féin, Adams and Co will go on feeling that the process is flawed. This suggests that, as a starting point, Ministers should put **renewed pressure on the Unionists** to engage with the parties and process even if not yet with Sinn Féin.

10. There is also the associated issue of Confidence Building Measures. Uppermost in Sinn Féin's mind are the security forces' profile in Northern Ireland, which they regard as far too high, prisoners and Irish language and culture. We are sending you a separate note about security, in response to your letter of 13 November.
11. As to other measures we have, of course, already taken a number of significant steps to boost confidence in the Nationalist community. These range from the rescinding of exclusion orders, the announcement of the ending of the internment powers, through to important developments on prisoners. The main points are listed in the attached speaking notes.
12. On prisoners, there are two particular issues which remain under consideration. There is one outstanding case of a prisoner seeking transfer from GB to Northern Ireland - Martin - which is currently being processed. The other is that the Home Secretary is considering the level of tariff to set for

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the Balcombe Street Gang, ahead of their possible transfer to the Republic. Other issues around at present include McAliskey, the extradition cases in the USA, and the issue of whether Jimmy Smith - who was extradited to Northern Ireland from the USA last year - should be able to count his time in custody in the States against his remaining sentence in Northern Ireland, but there is no action we can or should take on these at present. Aside from the Martin transfer and repatriations to the Republic of Ireland we thereafter come up pretty quickly against the bigger issue of early release. We are continuing to release prisoners early under the 1995 legislation - some 230 to date - but further significant change, which would require legislation, is some way off.

13. It would not be surprising if the Irish were to let out more prisoners before Christmas. It would be worth probing this with the Taoiseach. The Irish have acted unilaterally on this in the past and although it puts the spotlight on our own position we should not necessarily discourage them from further releases provided they are not of the most serious cases. It would also be helpful if they would recognise that we are releasing prisoners under the 1995 legislation.

#### Handling

14. We do not ourselves judge that any dramatic gestures towards Sinn Féin are necessary at present though if the talks fail to pick up pace, the UUP remain disengaged from the talks, and RSF/CIRA and the dissidents begin to cause serious problems for Sinn Féin, greater intervention could be required. Nonetheless we should go on working purposefully at the Confidence Building agenda, for both Nationalists and Unionists. The Prime Minister can remind the Taoiseach of what we have done so far and confirm for him that we will go on looking actively for further measures. It would help Sinn Féin

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if the two Governments could go on doing everything possible to inject momentum into the talks, and if HMG were to encourage the Unionists to engage more purposefully in the process. The Prime Minister might also tease out whether the Irish have any plans for the early release of prisoners. The Taoiseach is likely to encourage the Prime Minister to offer Mr Adams an early meeting at Downing Street; this is already on the cards as part of a series of meetings with the other parties. Given the publicity the issue has already generated, it might be sensible to offer Sinn Féin a date soon, despite Unionist objections, even if the meeting itself is some way off.

*Yours ever*  
*P S Wilkinson*

P S WILKINSON  
Private Secretary to Adam Ingram JP MP  
Minister of State

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