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**FAXED**

b PB  
- To Ken Lindsay  
(MO)  
1/12/97

From the Principal Private Secretary

**SUBJECT  
MASTER**

30 November 1997

**Filed on:**

Dear Ken

### NORTHERN IRELAND: HEADS OF AGREEMENT

I should record three conversations over the weekend.

#### Hume

1. The Prime Minister spoke to John Hume on Saturday morning for about 15 minutes. Hume was in Donegal, with Nancy Soderberg staying with him, and was in relaxed mode.

2. The Prime Minister explained that he was keen to move the process on. He had urged Trimble to engage with Sinn Fein and thought that, if a short Heads of Agreement paper could be tabled, this might help achieve that. Hume said that he had been urging the Chairmen of the Strands to do more privately to find common ground between the parties and seek out the main parties' bottom lines. It was impossible to negotiate around the talks table - there were too many small parties there.

3. The Prime Minister then ran through the Heads of Agreement draft, without reading out the actual text. Hume did not comment on the tirets on the consent principle/constitutional change or on the Council of the islands. On North-South, the Prime Minister said this was obviously the most difficult area for the Unionists, but wording had to go beyond talk of "arrangements". He therefore wondered whether Council of Ministers for North-South Cooperation might work as a title. It would obviously need to be accountable back to respective parliamentary institutions in North and South. Hume said that he had long promoted such a concept on the EU analogy, with a strong secretariat and parliamentary tier made up of representatives from the Dail and the Northern Ireland Assembly. He thought the Unionists could be attracted to it. Obviously,

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in any area, the two ministers concerned would only act if they agreed. It should be pointed out to the Unionists that British and Irish ministers already discussed many subjects of common interest to North and South eg agriculture, in the EU context. In any case, he thought that the Prime Minister's proposed title was a good one.

4. The Prime Minister went on to the tired on inter-governmental machinery. Its range of subjects should not be confined to Northern Ireland. He had mentioned this to Ahern. Hume saw no difficulty with this. When Northern Ireland was discussed, a representative of the Assembly should be there. The Prime Minister concluded that the final point would be on the equality and justice agenda. Hume said there would obviously be no problem with the SDLP on that front.

5. Hume went on that he had invited Trimble to a trilateral meeting with Adams, on the basis of a statement to come out of such a meeting agreed in advance, to the effect that it was accepted by Sinn Fein that the Northern Ireland problem could not be solved without the participation and agreement of the Unionists. Adams had already accepted this. The Prime Minister said that it would obviously be good if such a meeting could be pulled off.

6. The Prime Minister continued that there were rumours around that the IRA had already decided to call off their ceasefire and were only waiting for the right moment to restart violence. Did Hume have any wind of this? Hume said not. He had asked Adams about the recent difficulties, and he had said that things were going well. In Hume's view, there were always bound to be difficult debates when an organisation was changing direction, and a few people might not be able to cope when decisions were taken. There was also unease among republicans about the slowness of movement on prisoners and troop withdrawal. The Prime Minister said we were continuing to work on both these fronts. He concluded that he hoped to let Hume have a draft of the Heads of Agreement before too long.

#### Trimble

7. I spoke to Trimble earlier today (Sunday) to explore his reaction to the draft text we had sent him on Friday. He was grumpy. The points he had made to the Prime Minister did not seem to have been reflected in the text and he would have a number of textual comments. But there was one big conceptual issue where our text was unsatisfactory, namely the Council of these Islands.



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This has to be as an umbrella for all the other institutions, and to have real substance. The UUP would not be fobbed off with some vague peripheral body. Meanwhile Trimble was also not at all happy about Andrews' remarks on the North-South point over the weekend and would be making that very clear. News of the Prime Minister's meeting with Adams had also not gone down well in the Unionist community, even if he could understand it himself. People were getting very edgy, and there was nothing being done to reassure the Unionists at all. The NIO continued to poison the atmosphere (he said Ken Maginnis had written to Dr Mowlam about this). Trimble said that he would let us have a fax on Monday setting out UUP comments on the draft text (once he had consulted Donaldson and Empey).

### Teahon

9. Finally, I also spoke to Paddy Teahon. I took him through our efforts on prisoners, which he welcomed, and warned him that the tariffs the Home Secretary set might be very tough (without going further than that). I mentioned our continuing efforts on Heads of Agreement, and said that the Prime Minister had been talking to both Trimble and Hume. I did not take him through the text (not least in the light of Trimble's comments above) but mentioned the possible title, Council of Ministers for North-South Cooperation, on the North-South front, and said that Hume seemed to see no difficulty with this.

10. Teahon reacted cautiously. Hume was "not well" again. His ideas, based on the European model, would not necessarily run in Dublin. For Ahern, there would have to be an all-Ireland executive aspect, not just each minister acting separately in his own jurisdiction. I did not try to pursue this too much further.

11. I also mentioned to Teahon stories we had heard that the IRA might be thinking about a return to violence. They did not seem to fit the political context, but were obviously worrying, not least in the light of the Prime Minister's planned meeting with Adams on 11 December. Teahon took the point immediately. He had heard nothing of this kind, although the recent punishment shootings were a bit worrying and there was obviously still some difficulty with the Sands family. At the latest Irish officials' meeting with Sinn Fein on 24 November, McGuinness and co. had been a bit worried about the Unionists and Irish cutting a deal without them, but had otherwise seemed on track and in negotiating mode. But he understood what I was saying and would go back to Doherty to check. Doherty had reassured him earlier that Munster was under control. I said that we might be in touch again about this - we would need a



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degree of comfort about the republicans' continuing commitment to the ceasefire and to peaceful means before the meeting with Adams.

11. Teahon added that the arrangements with the UUP were firming up. They had nominated Empey and Weir. This had not filled the Irish with enthusiasm and they had asked whether Donaldson could not also be involved. The Irish side would be Mansergh, Gallagher and himself.

12. Finally Teahon acknowledged that Andrews' weekend comments had not been clever. He said Gallagher had spoken to Donaldson to warn him before the remarks became public. The Irish hoped that this would take some of the sting out of the Unionist reaction. I told him that Trimble had nevertheless been very unhappy.

Comment

13. I will be in touch again when we have Trimble's written comments.

I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

pp Helena Hopkin  
JOHN HOLMES

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Northern Ireland Office