



Top JCH JP  
cc: PB  
MC

Prime Minister

12 December 1997

Dear Tony

## **NORTHERN IRELAND: PROPOSED INVITATION TO PRESIDENT MANDELA**

As part of my drive to enhance self-confidence within Northern Ireland and improving its international image, I am keen that we should actively pursue a policy of attracting high profile foreign visitors to Northern Ireland. We have already taken some steps on this: for example, there is agreement in principle to hold next year's Anglo-Italian Summit in Northern Ireland. I believe that such visits will do much to establish an air of normality in Northern Ireland, improve the community's self image, and strengthen the peace.

In my view, President Mandela stands out as the person whose presence would give the greatest boost to Northern Ireland. Such a visit, would, I believe, be welcomed by all sides of the community; his central message of reconciliation would have a particular resonance for Northern Ireland, especially at this stage in the talks process.

On timing, a visit, if it goes ahead, is likely to take place in September 1998: the President of the NI Chamber of Commerce has recently written to President Mandela inviting him to address a conference then, and is confident that he will accept. We cannot predict exactly what the circumstances in Northern Ireland will be at that time, but if the political and security situations hold good, such a visit has highly attractive possibilities.





I should welcome your support for an approach to President Mandela along the lines of the attached letter.

I am copying this to the Foreign Secretary.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'C' followed by a large 'M' and a 'D'.