

## DRAFT LETTER FROM SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND TO PRESIDENT MANDELA

President Nelson Mandela

I greatly hope that you will be able to find the time to visit Northern Ireland and see at first hand the great efforts to build a lasting peace which are being made there.

We are at an important time in the Northern Ireland peace process. We now have Sinn Fein and the representatives of the main Unionist party at the talks; the IRA ceasefire is in place; and the British and Irish governments have declared their intention to see agreement reached in the talks by next May. The next year will, therefore, be a crucial one for Northern Ireland.

South Africa has already made a valuable contribution towards the search for peace in Northern Ireland: the recent conference in the Western Cape aimed to break down the barriers between the communities and to forge trust among old enemies. We are grateful for all such initiatives which help to heal the divisions between the communities after so many years of violence, and to build a confident and forward looking Northern Ireland. I am particularly grateful to you for the personal interest which you took in this.

At this important time, I would like on behalf of the British government to invite you to visit Northern Ireland. Tony Blair adds his personal support to this invitation. I believe that your experiences would have a particular resonance for the people of Northern Ireland and I am confident that you would be warmly welcomed by them.

I know that the President of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry has recently written to you to invite you to address a conference in September 1998. From our point of view, you would be

most welcome to expand on this speaking engagement or to visit Northern Ireland at any other time that is convenient for you.

I appreciate that you receive very many invitations from all over the world.

I greatly hope that you will be able to find the time to visit Northern Ireland and see at first hand the great efforts to build a lasting peace which are being made there.

Mr. Mandela, PS/NO 10

#### REPLY WITH THE IRISH

1. Thank you for copying your letter of 11 December to Ken Lindsey.

2. I agree that the points raised were those you recorded, but it is perhaps also worth noting that the Irish Government, and I think because he is one of the most moderate officials on the Irish side.

3. Tim Dalton said that negotiations on both constitutional issues and the three strands were extremely difficult indeed, but that nevertheless the outline of a deal on both was discernible - agreement on the basis of sufficient consensus should be possible. There were, however, three other items which were not central to the Talks process, but which could nevertheless derail it. These were - prisoners, decommissioning and, to a lesser degree, policing. Tim Dalton said that he thought it unlikely any agreement would endure in the long term unless these three issues were resolved in parallel. He accepted that much work had been done, but wondered whether the two governments should devote even more attention to them?

4. Personally, I found the dinner conversation with Tim Dalton generally constructive. But I came away with the impression that he would still regard a formidable problem. Irish negotiators are clearly beyond what Unionists will find acceptable. I was reminded of the response given by Sir John, editor of the Belfast Telegraph, some months ago to my question as to whether it was realistic to expect a solution next year. He said he doubted it. He feared that what happened in the 1970s would happen again. As for the Unionists, would anyone make in the way of North/South bodies than the Unionists could tolerate.

5. Tim Dalton's letter to the Irish Government on account of the prisoners issue.