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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AAn'l
H/Agreement
KL

From the Private Secretary

7 January 1998

Dear Gen,

HEADS OF AGREEMENT

Following the Prime Minister's conversation with the Taoiseach on 6 January, I have had several discussions with Paddy Teahon. I have stressed the importance of using our draft Heads of Agreement as the basis for discussion with Trimble, rather than an Irish document, while accepting that the Irish would want to have an input into our draft. I have explained that the Prime Minister regards the present opportunity, with Trimble tied in to draft Heads of Agreement in a particular form, as too good to miss, and possibly unlikely to recur. I have underlined the importance, in the Prime Minister's view, of achieving agreement on a text to be tabled on 12 January if humanly possible.

This has proved hard going with Teahon. He has explained the need for the Irish to have the elements important to them fully included, and their view that our draft is too stark and also unlikely to be saleable to the SDLP, never mind Sinn Fein. Nevertheless Teahon agreed last night to look again at the text the Irish were working on, to take into account our points.

When we spoke again this morning, Teahon said that they had tried to incorporate nearly all the elements of our language, while fleshing out the draft. The only bit of our text with which they had problems was the reference to a Council on North/South cooperation. Cooperation was not a strong enough term for them. On procedure, they had decided, in the light of our concerns, not to give Trimble any text at their meeting later today, but to talk through the elements with him. They would be ready to follow up with a text the following day as appropriate. They also wanted to begin preparing the SDLP and Sinn Fein for what was happening.

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... Teahon subsequently sent me, on a strictly personal basis, the attached text of a possible statement by the Prime Minister and Taoiseach for Friday, and their latest version of Heads of Agreement, with the text in bold representing where they had incorporated our language.

I was able to give him some initial comments before their meeting with Trimble, as follows:

- (i) I said that the draft was much longer than needed. The longer it was, the more there was for others to attack. Teahon seemed to accept this point, and agreed it could be a good deal tighter.
- (ii) I queried the reference to a new British Constitutional Act in the first paragraph. Teahon said that this was terminology suggested by the UUP.
- (iii) I said that the sentences at the end of the main paragraph on the Northern Ireland Assembly could be cut down, for example a simple reference to a need for checks and balances. Again, Teahon seemed to agree.
- (iv) On the wider relationships, I suggested that the order of British/Irish and North/South sections be changed, since that would fit better with Trimble's conception of the relationship between the two. Teahon seemed to think this would not be difficult.
- (v) I said that Trimble would be likely to have difficulties with various bits of the North/South passage, in particular any reference to a pre-determined number of executive agencies. Teahon understood the point but said that the UUP needed to understand that there would have to be a significant number of agencies.
- (vi) I said that the end section on rights, justice, prisoners etc struck me as much too long, and containing language which would be extremely neuralgic, particularly on policing, prisoners and security. We would ourselves have great difficulty with the main paragraph of the section on prisoners. In the three paragraphs on justice and police, prisoners and confidence issues, all that was really needed, and all that was likely to be acceptable at this stage, was the first sentence in each case.

Teahon said that he would give me a read out this evening of the meeting with the UUP. This would also give us a chance to comment further on any text.

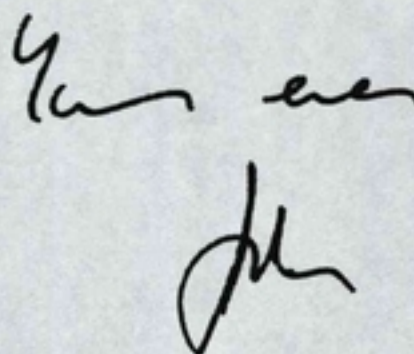
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I would be grateful if the experts could go through it quickly and let me have their views, if necessary on the telephone. It would also be helpful to have very rapid views on the draft joint statement.

I am copying this to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), and to Sir Christopher Meyer (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin) by fax.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Holmes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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