



Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

SUBJECT
MASTER

Filed on:

Top: FA/APS

cc COB

AC

PM / Chequer

FA/PS (Chequer)

N/O (London)

16 January, 1998.

The Right Honourable Tony Blair, M.P.,
The Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London.

Dear Tony,

I thought it useful to set down my assessment of

- where the Talks Process has now reached after the tabling of the Propositions document this week, and
- how the reaction to the document, especially on the part of Sinn Fein, will in my view affect the future of the Process.

I believe that the agreement of and tabling of the Propositions document was an important step in the Talks Process. I want to thank you for the time and effort you put in in Tokyo with all the difficulties of doing so at a distance, in particular in convincing David Trimble of the value of the exercise at crucial moments, but we need to be very conscious that we have major bridge-repairing to do in other quarters.

I believe that we should now proceed with two separate, though complementary, exercises -



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- amplify the Propositions document in the form of a preliminary draft agreement which, like the Propositions document itself, could be discussed with all the parties, privately, when we both consider it right to do so
- prepare detailed papers on each of our agreed Propositions which could be tabled at the Talks - I understand that this work is already under way - recognising that there will be other areas to be covered as well.

I believe that it would be very difficult to advance discussion on individual Propositions (by means of discussion on the detailed papers) unless the parties know how we see the wider picture developing - that is why I am proposing a two-pronged approach. We need to avoid presenting parties in the future with what appear to be faits accomplis with very little time to consider them.

The downside of this week's tabling exercise is that Sinn Fein are strongly upset at the document itself and by the manner in which it was put together and believe that both of us were too indulgent of Unionist concerns in developing and agreeing it and simply overrode their views. I do not fully accept this criticism since, from the Irish Government viewpoint, we do not see ourselves as having settled for less than the Framework Document and in fact want to see improvements in it in a number of areas. Unfortunately, despite this reality, there is a perception in Nationalist Ireland, especially in Northern Ireland, that both of us reacted to the 'playing of the Orange Card'.

For this reason I believe it crucially important that in a number of areas I mentioned to you on Sunday night both of us must act in ways that are sympathetic to Nationalist positions in the period ahead. In particular I believe



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you should accept the necessity for an independent inquiry in relation to Bloody Sunday and that you should set tariffs for the so-called Balcombe Street Four quickly and at a level not above those recommended by the Trial Judge and preferably below that. I understand that both these issues may be reaching finality in your system. I cannot impress on you too strongly the importance of acting as I have stated here.

Paddy Teahon has spoken to John Holmes last evening. He told him I was sending this letter and suggested that we might talk about it and any other issues on your mind later today.

I look forward to doing that.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Bertie', is written over a faint, large watermark of the harp logo.

Taoiseach