



Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

Top: SEt
cc: COS
PB
AC

17 February 1998.

The British Prime Minister,
Mr. Tony Blair MP.

Dear Tony,

The Secretary of State Mo Mowlam will have transmitted to you the draft text from my office of an unprecedented statement that Sinn Féin might be prepared to make disowning the killings last week and disassociating themselves from those who carried them out. They are not of course committed to making any such statement, or in such terms, unless it would make the difference between them being allowed to stay and being thrown out.

The Talks now face huge difficulties. Nationalist sentiment, especially North of the border, is strongly against the exclusion of Sinn Féin. The SDLP have signalled their problems clearly. I am also concerned about an overwhelming reaction against the whole talks process, foreshadowed by the negative reaction to the Propositions Document, despite all our best efforts to explain it. You will naturally have a concern about the effect any decision not to expel Sinn Féin could have on the Unionist side.

Nevertheless, I believe we have now to consider carefully, whether there are alternative options. Sinn Féin have made it clear to me and the Secretary of State that they may be prepared to agree a far-reaching statement of disassociation, as a means of fulfilling their obligations under the Mitchell Principles. I am not clear, whether we will get this type of opportunity again. A relevant consideration on my reading of the Mitchell Principles is the attitude



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of the associated party to their breach. You will recall that the UDP declined to disavow the actions of the UFF.

There are many dangers in the situation. A plausible argument is being made that a blind eye was turned for a long time to unclaimed Loyalist killings without swift action being taken. We run the danger of delivering Sinn Féin up to the mercy of unreconstructed militaristic critics in the Republican Movement.

I am anxious that we face up to the difficulties together, and examine possible solutions. The choice we appear to be faced with this morning is the possible complete alienation of one or other community from the process, so it is important that we try to explore some middle course of action. In the context of the approach I have outlined we would have to consider bringing forward the re-entry of the UDP perhaps accompanied by suitable assurances from them. It would also require your powers of persuasion with the Ulster Unionist Party.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to be 'Bertie', written in a cursive, flowing style.

Taoiseach.