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Firearms & H
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From the Private Secretary

4 February 1998

Dear Steven,

FIREARMS LAW IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for your letter of 30 January, setting out where we now stand on the proposed reforms package for firearms controls in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister agrees that we should not pursue for the time being any move to prohibit the approximately 2,000 target hand guns in the Province, and that we should also avoid any suggestion of a review of Personal Protection Weapons, given all the sensitivities. However, on the assumption that the rest of the package does not have the same sensitivity (and the Prime Minister would like Mr Ingram to check again), the Prime Minister is content for the remaining reform proposals to go ahead to consultation.

The Prime Minister recognises the possibility that Northern Ireland will become a refuge for firearms prohibited elsewhere in the United Kingdom. If this begins to happen, clearly we will need to look again. But for the moment, he believes that there are particular circumstances in Northern Ireland which mean that a straightforward transfer of the post-Dunblane legislation there is not appropriate, in the absence of a wider peace settlement.

I am copying this to Ken Sutton (Home Office) and Ken Lindsay (Northern Ireland Office).

Yours
John

JOHN HOLMES

Steven McCourt Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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