



10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

22 November 1996

I have been reflecting on the position we have reached following our phone conversation on 6 November.

Since the summer when I first discussed this matter with John Hume and in my recent discussions with you, I have had two concerns. First, the IRA's actions on the ground, and what we know of their future plans, are incompatible with what we have been told is Mr. Adams' readiness to guarantee a permanent ceasefire immediately following a Government statement which, as I have said throughout, can only repeat existing policy positions. But, secondly, I am determined that the peace process should continue because that is what the people of Northern Ireland want and deserve. We have therefore kept the door open for Sinn Féin to join the negotiations if there is a genuinely unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. But each atrocity the IRA has committed has widened the credibility gap to be bridged in the event of a new ceasefire.

As I have repeatedly made clear, I cannot - and will not - negotiate Government policy in exchange for a ceasefire. All along, I have said I will stick strictly to what is existing Government policy as set out on the public record. The text I was given by John Hume on 10 October departs from existing Government policy in places. I cannot accept it as it stands.

When we spoke following the text we showed you on 5 November, we agreed that any ceasefire declaration needed to offer more credible guarantees

than the last one. I made clear we would need to be convinced that a new ceasefire would be intended to last and that we also looked for more commitment to the consent principle and parallel decommissioning. You therefore agreed to ask Sinn Fein for the terms of an IRA ceasefire declaration. I said that if these were sufficiently clear and dependable this would create a new situation, and we might be prepared to reconsider the language used in our text of 5 November about the terms of entry for Sinn Fein following a ceasefire.

I am very grateful for your determined efforts but, as I understand it, Sinn Fein have failed to respond with any language. I am told Sinn Fein said they were not prepared to spell out the bottom line of their language until they were sure what we would say in our statement.

Let there be no doubt I want progress and not stalemate, if that is achievable. Since Sinn Fein failed to respond to your efforts, we have now reached the point where it is right for me to set out our firm position so that Sinn Fein are in no doubt of it and can respond accordingly. The attached text does this.

I believe it is a reasonable and fair position, consistent with our existing policy and with our obligations under the law. It does what John Hume originally told us would deliver an IRA ceasefire - a ceasefire which would be for good this time. It sets out key reassurances on the basis of our existing policy. It takes account of the suggested approach you put to us on 5 November and sets out a process of entry to the negotiations which seeks to take account of the political realities on all sides. I know you understand these realities - created by the IRA's own actions. It is neither credible nor deliverable to ignore them.

What this text cannot, of course, do - not least because Sinn Fein have refused to tell you - is take account of what the IRA will say if they declare a

ceasefire and how that will be reflected on the ground. If there is a new ceasefire, our reaction to it will depend crucially on both of these things.

We now need urgently to establish whether a genuine and dependable ceasefire will be delivered if the British Government sets out its existing policy position on the negotiations and how Sinn Fein may join them in the terms attached. It should lead straightaway to an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, which should never have been abandoned. That would greatly enhance the prospects for lasting peace and an overall political settlement.

But if the IRA chooses not to take this route to inclusive negotiations, it should be under no illusions. The IRA will not bomb Sinn Fein to the negotiating table, now or in the future - further violence will simply expose Sinn Fein's words about peace as a cynical ploy which commands no credibility. As you and I have both made clear, the talks will go forward without Sinn Fein.

If Mr. Adams is serious, the clear position set out in the attached text offers the basis on which Sinn Fein can set out the terms of an IRA ceasefire, in which case I hope we can quickly bring this to the conclusion which we all desire. Christmas then offers a natural break over which all can reflect on the new situation. But if not, then to end the current uncertainty and speculation, I believe I must set out our position in public before the end of this month.

I shall be writing shortly in similar terms to John Hume.

Yours Ever,  
John

Mr. John Bruton, T.D.