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LONDON SW1A 2AA

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From the Private Secretary

19 November 1996

Dear Gen,

### HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

I should record that John Hume has been on the 'phone to me a couple of times today. He is concerned at the stand-off in the discussions and worried both that there might be further IRA attacks, and that the present republican leadership might be overthrown, with potentially disastrous consequences. I have explained that we are disappointed with the outcome so far of his efforts and those of the Irish Government to extract convincing language from the IRA/Sinn Fein about the lasting nature of any new ceasefire. He said that he was still pursuing this, but would redouble his efforts.

He then floated two ideas with me:

- i. He could take someone with him to see Adams to convince this third person of the seriousness of the Sinn Fein approach. At one stage in the conversation he seemed to have in mind British officials, and at another stage someone like Tom King. I said that we had never ruled out direct contact by officials with Sinn Fein, but there was no specific political agreement to allow this to happen in the absence of a ceasefire. There was also the question of whether establishing direct links at this stage would simply serve to confuse and delay, given the need to establish a dialogue with a degree of confidence on both sides.
- ii. He reverted to his previous idea that he could write a letter to the Prime Minister, accepting full responsibility if his judgement about the likely permanence of a new ceasefire proved to be wrong. I said that, while we appreciated the offer, it was not clear that this would help much politically. If the Prime Minister was exposed to a charge of gullibility, it made little difference if he was seen as

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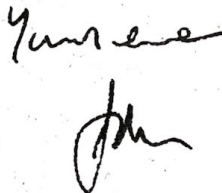
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having been taken in by Sinn Fein or by John Hume.

In his usual throw-away manner, Hume did not pursue the points further. But he added that he was seeing Trimble tomorrow (Wednesday), and would take him through the Hume/Adams initiative, without of course showing him any papers. He thought he could convince Trimble that there was a real opportunity here. He could not see why the Unionists could not sit down with Sinn Fein in the talks, when Unionists' councillors were prepared to sit down with Sinn Fein councillors all over Northern Ireland. He might also suggest to Trimble that Trimble go with him to see Adams. I reminded him that Trimble was already aware of the initiative in general terms, and suggested that he might have a rather uphill struggle with Trimble, particularly about the latter idea!

But there is no doubt of his sincerity in wanting to move things forward.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).



JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq  
Northern Ireland Office

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