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From: JOHN HOLMES
Date: 1 November 1996

PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

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- 2 -

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6. The Irish are taking an increasingly tough line about the possibility of a time delay before Sinn Fein could be treated like the other parties. They believe strongly that their proposed approach is the right one: in their view, Sinn Fein should be invited to Stormont to swear allegiance to the Mitchell principles. Thereafter, the chairmen would go into bilateral mode with all the parties. This would produce an effective gap in the talks proper during which Sinn Fein/IRA intentions could be weighed up.
7. We have told them clearly that this will not do, since Sinn Fein would clearly be in the talks immediately after a ceasefire. That will simply not run politically here. We have suggested instead that we would want to take time to weigh up a new ceasefire, that it would be for Sinn Fein/IRA to persuade us of

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- 3 -

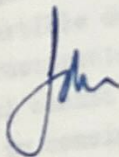
their goodwill, but that we might be willing to fill any time gap with some positive action, for example as a start officials might be able to meet Sinn Fein.

A particular Irish insistence is that you and the Taoiseach should speak again before any irrevocable action is taken. They fear that we will scupper the prospect of a ceasefire, and they will suffer as a result. I have assured them that you will certainly be in touch with the Taoiseach before we do anything.

It is difficult to be sure whether events will happen in a rush over the weekend or whether in practice anything will happen for a couple of days yet. It may well be late Sunday or Monday before Hume comes back to us definitively. Alternatively, we could be faced at very short notice with a declaration of a ceasefire, although this seems very unlikely.

Various contingency texts are around, but I will not bother you with them now. However, you may like to look at a possible statement on a ceasefire. I attach the NIO's (totally unusable) version, and a revised version of my own.

I will obviously be in touch over the weekend as soon as any further definite news emerges.



JOHN HOLMES

1 November 1996

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DRAFT STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO IRA STATEMENT RESTORING CEASEFIRE

1. I welcome the Statement by the IRA restoring the ceasefire, and that from the President of Sinn Féin [with a renewed commitment to pursue, through a political process, a just and lasting settlement.] [I welcome the indications that this ceasefire is intended to be permanent/irrevocable/to last for ever/the expressions of regret/the commitment to a democratic and peaceful process.]
2. For our part, we hope that this ceasefire represents a decisive repudiation of violence, recognising that it cannot succeed, and that we can move to inclusive negotiations to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands. For our part, the Government will do all in our power to bring about such a settlement and establish the lasting peace which all the people of Northern Ireland hope for and deserve.
3. At this time our particular thoughts are with those who have needlessly suffered at the hands of the IRA's futile violence over the past 9 months. Violence has achieved nothing except to harden attitudes and set back the cause of peace. It is more clear than ever that peace can only be built on the basis of exclusively peaceful methods and the democratic process.
4. Under the legislation setting up the Talks, if there is an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, Sinn Féin is to be invited to nominate a team to join the negotiations. In the light of recent events, unless there are some incontrovertible developments supporting it, a dependable judgement that the restoration of the ceasefire is indeed genuinely unequivocal cannot be formed at once. We have made clear that we will need to consider whether words, actions and all the

- 1 -
CONFIDENTIAL

QT/MR/71296-1.11.96

circumstances are consistent with the declared ceasefire. [For example, whether or not any paramilitary activity, including surveillance, targeting and weapons preparation, continued would be relevant.] [We shall take sufficient time to ensure that a well founded judgement can be made.]

5. As the Taoiseach has said, it is for Sinn Féin and the IRA to persuade others that a ceasefire is for real [and it is for Sinn Féin to establish commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and show that they abide by the democratic process.]

6. We hope that their words and actions will quickly convince us that this is so.

7. We plan to meet as soon as possible the leaders of the main Northern Ireland political parties, and the loyalists, to consider the implications of the ceasefire announcement.

8. We also wish to meet the Irish Government to share assessments of the new situation.

9. Thereafter Ministers will be ready, after initial preparatory contact at official level, to meet Sinn Féin.

10. The purpose will be to explore the nature of the ceasefire, what assurances can be given and confidence building measures established. If Sinn Féin are to join the negotiations, they will also need to be brought up to speed with progress so far. Our hope is that Sinn Féin will help to establish, as soon as is appropriate, that it would be right for them to be brought into the Talks process.

11. It is clear that, to be successful, the negotiations must be based on exclusively democratic and peaceful means. There must be no recourse to the threat, actual or implied, or use of violence or

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No. 1444 P. 14/14

coercion. So, on entering the negotiations, Sinn Féin, like the other participants, will need to make clear their total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the Report of the International Body chaired by Senator George Mitchell.

- 3 -

CONFIDENTIAL

QT/MR/71296-1.11.96

POSSIBLE STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER

I welcome the announcement by the IRA of a new ceasefire. It is a recognition that the return to violence of last February was a dead end. It would not and could not sway the British Government's policy. Our first thoughts must be with the needless victims of that futile violence. ✓

Politics not violence is indeed the way forward, and I look forward to the accumulation of evidence that Sinn Fein and the IRA fully accept that. It is for them to demonstrate that this time the ceasefire will last, and to convince all concerned of their commitment to exclusively peaceful methods. No-one will be more delighted than I if they can do so. ✓

Under the legislation setting up the multi-party talks, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland can invite Sinn Fein to join the multi-party talks in Belfast when he is convinced that a new ceasefire is genuinely unequivocal. Let Sinn Fein and the IRA now convince us, by their words and their actions, that this is so. Clearly such a judgement cannot be reached immediately. ✓

But I do not think it is worth continuing the battle against such a small force. I therefore suggest we give in gracefully, while insisting that the IRA should explain clearly and frankly to the Unionists why we have reluctantly reached this conclusion. They also need to do serious work on the peace process. The current lines in Annex B are pretty pathetic.