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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

20 Nov 1996
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From the Private Secretary

20 November 1996

Dear Ken,

HUME/ADAMS: NEXT STEPS

As discussed with Michael Ancram this morning, I have shown your letter of 19 November and the revised texts attached to the Prime Minister. I have subsequently tried my hand at a revised version of the key paragraphs of the draft statement, which I attach. You will see that I have tried to incorporate more of our existing position, in the terms in which we have put it to the Irish and others, in the early part of the redraft. Otherwise I have made less explicit some of the points which are potentially more neuralgic, for example early Ministerial meetings with Sinn Fein and the effective suspension of the talks if there is a new ceasefire. This is not because I doubt the likelihood of both these things happening, but the assumption that they will happen is not helpful presentationally to some of those concerned.

The Prime Minister has not yet seen this revised version but I hope to have a chance to show it to him later in the morning. There might then be a chance to discuss it quickly with your Secretary of State after the meeting with the Loyalists, if that can be brought to an end by, say, 1530. It remains doubtful whether we can reach agreement rapidly enough to enable a new text to be given to the Irish tonight, given the possible need to consult NI again - we also need to think whether we want to give the text to the Irish before we give it to Hume. If we do, they will simply try to prevent us giving it to Hume formally, as they did before.

On a minor point, it would be helpful to be clearer about how far a reference to the Irish language is neuralgic for the Unionists.

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

Yours ever
John

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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6. The British and Irish Governments agree that, beyond the unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, these negotiations are without preconditions. But in the light of the breaking of the ceasefire and the events since then, assurances are obviously needed that any new ceasefire would be intended to be genuinely unequivocal, i.e. lasting and not simply a tactical device.

7. A reliable judgement to this effect would depend on whether words, actions and all the circumstances were consistent with a lasting ceasefire. For example, how far the declaration of a new ceasefire involved convincing commitment to the end of violence and to exclusively peaceful means would be an important indicator. Whether or not any paramilitary activity, including surveillance, targeting and weapons preparation, continued would also be directly relevant. Developments which were inconsistent with an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire or the Mitchell principles would affect consideration adversely. Sufficient time would have to be taken to ensure the requirements of paragraphs 8 and 9 of Command Paper 3232 were accordingly met before Sinn Fein were invited to participate in negotiations.

8. Consistent with this, we envisage that the following process would follow the declaration by the IRA of an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire with the stated purpose of the conflict being permanently ended:

- meetings with Sinn Fein at various levels to explore with them what assurances could be given and what confidence-building measures established;
- the British and Irish Governments would invite Sinn Fein to meet them together for the purpose of making an early total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence;

- the two Governments would then propose bilateral and other consultations with all the parties to seek to determine how, if this process could be successfully concluded, the negotiations could most constructively be advanced, including the issue of the participants adopting an agreed indicative timeframe for taking stock of their progress;
- if Sinn Fein were invited formally to participate following the successful conclusion of this process, the two Governments would expect the independent chairmen to convene a plenary session for all participants within a further 4-6 weeks or the most practicable date thereafter, to consider the outcome of these consultations and the future programme of work.

9. From their entry into negotiations onwards, Sinn Fein would, in common with all the other participants, be subject to all the agreed provisions and rules of procedure. These include those governing the contingency where any participant is no longer entitled to participate on the grounds that they have demonstrably dishonoured the principles of democracy and non-violence.