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John Hume MP MEP

1 November 1996

When we met on Tuesday, I said I would let you have a clear response to the text you gave us on 10 October.

Throughout the time we have discussed these matters, I have had two concerns. First, the IRA's murderous actions on the ground, and what we know of their future plans, are wholly incompatible with what you tell me is Mr Adams' readiness to guarantee a permanent ceasefire immediately following a Government statement which, as you know, 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. So Sinn Féin can still join the negotiations if there is a genuinely unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, but each atrocity the IRA commits means the credibility gap to be bridged is that much wider.

All the evidence reaching me suggests the IRA are intent on war, not peace. This whole exercise could simply be a cynical tactical manoeuvre deliberately designed to distract us all from making real progress in the talks, if necessary without Sinn Féin. If that is so, I am determined it will not succeed. It is now for Mr Adams to show that he is serious about this initiative by setting out clearly the terms and circumstances in which an IRA ceasefire would be declared.

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As I have repeatedly made clear, I will not negotiate Government policy in exchange for a ceasefire - that would be to appease violence. All along, I have said I will stick strictly to what is existing Government policy as set out on the public record. The text you gave me on 10 October departs from existing Government policy, so I cannot accept it. The text attached does reflect Government policy and we would defend it as such.

Mr Adams cannot continue to play games with words while the IRA is directly threatening the lives of men and women for whom I am responsible. If he is genuine about seeking a ceasefire, this text provides the assurances about existing Government policy which he sought. It is now for Mr Adams to deliver on his promise.

So that there can be no misunderstanding, I want to set out clearly how we would respond if a ceasefire were declared. Following the Lisburn attack, it is impossible to think of Sinn Féin entering negotiations immediately a ceasefire is declared. It would be seen as naive in the extreme to take no time to ensure that actions on the ground and all the circumstances were consistent with the words of a declared ceasefire. That is well understood by both the Irish and US Governments.

Incontrovertible evidence that the IRA had abandoned violence for good would secure Sinn Féin's rapid entry into the negotiations. We would in any case be ready to meet Sinn Féin to explore the nature of the ceasefire, what assurances could be given and confidence building measures established. For Sinn Féin to join the negotiations, they would also need to be brought up to date with progress so far. As things stand now it is difficult to see that a firm judgement could be reached, and Sinn Féin brought

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sufficiently up to speed with progress, to enable Sinn Féin to join the negotiations before we expect they will adjourn around 11 December for 4 weeks or so over Christmas. But it is open to Sinn Féin and the IRA to convince us otherwise by their words and actions.

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