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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

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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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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.

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