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OF 041700Z NOVEMBER 96

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: PRESS REPORTS OF BRITISH GOVERNMENT  
CONTACTS WITH SINN FEIN

## SUMMARY

1. Line to take on reports in today's British press on British Government contacts with Sinn Fein.

## DETAIL

2. Several British papers today have replayed a report in the Irish "Sunday Tribune" of 3 November of contacts between Sinn Fein and the British Government over the basis for a new ceasefire and the admission of Sinn Fein to the multi-party talks. If asked about these reports, posts should restrict themselves to the following:

- British Government has had no meetings with Sinn Fein or the IRA. Nor are any meetings likely in the absence of a ceasefire.
- The Government's position on talks and a settlement are absolutely clear and on the record, and not open to negotiation with Sinn Fein or the IRA.
- The Government has regular discussions with all the Northern



Ireland party leaders about all these issues. But we say nothing in private that we are not prepared to say in public.

- If a new IRA ceasefire were declared, the Government would have to look very carefully at what was being said and what was happening on the ground. It would obviously take time to establish that any ceasefire was genuinely unequivocal. As the Government has said many times, after the murderous attacks we have seen, there could be no question of the IRA declaring a ceasefire one day, and Sinn Fein joining the talks the next.

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