

## CONFIDENTIAL

From: JOHN HOLMES

Date: 3 November 1996



PRIME MINISTER

## SUNDAY TRIBUNE ARTICLE

I attach a copy of the article. As you will see, it is a mixture of accuracy and inaccuracy. The author has close contacts with Hume, and some of the details suggest Hume may have been the source, although it is difficult to believe he can regard such an article as helpful.

*It is - to him - the press under!!*

There is obviously a lot of interest in this story in Belfast, although not so far huge interest here. But this interest is likely to mount as the writers in tomorrow's newspapers put their copy together.

The Press Office have so far said virtually nothing in response to the few enquiries. But they need a line to take. Mayhew and Ancram are also attending the service to inaugurate the new Primate of All Ireland in Belfast this afternoon, and maybe asked about it then.

Since we spoke, I have discussed this again with Jonathan Haslam. I attach a revised line to take. This includes our attitude to a new ceasefire, because the Irish Times tomorrow is apparently likely to run a story about the Irish Government's proposal to us that Sinn Fein should be allowed to join the talks immediately to swear allegiance to the Mitchell principles, followed by a period of no substantive talks.

CONFIDENTIAL



**CONFIDENTIAL**

- 2 -

This would not be a statement but simply something on which the Press Office and the NIO could draw in response to questions. We may of course need to say more, depending on what others say. The Irish and we are trying to get hold of Hume. I will encourage the NIO to speak to Trimble also. Perhaps we could have a word about the revised line.



CONFIDENTIAL

**JOHN HOLMES****3 November 1996**

ftribune.slh

and no meetings with Sinn Féin or the IRA. Nor do we anticipate any, in the absence of a ceasefire. Our position on the talks and a settlement are absolutely clear and on the record, and, as the Sunday Tribune article notes, not open to negotiation with Sinn Féin or the IRA. We do of course have 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, we have made clear that we would need 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 we have 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 Féin joining the talks the next.

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

## LINE TO TAKE

We have had no meetings with Sinn Fein or the IRA. Nor do we anticipate any, in the absence of a ceasefire. Our position on the talks and a settlement are absolutely clear and on the record, and, as the Sunday Tribune article notes, not open to negotiation with Sinn Fein or the IRA. We do of course have 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, we have made clear that we would need 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 we have 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.

Tribune.sih

CONFIDENTIAL