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THE PRIME MINISTER

DRAFT LETTER TO HUME

When we met last Tuesday, I said I would let you have a 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 Fein 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.

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 in places, so I cannot accept it as it stands. The text attached does reflect Government policy. It represents what we are prepared to say.

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and 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. Meanwhile, as I said to you, it is 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. I fear that the initial indications you have given us about what might be said are not very encouraging. They certainly do not provide the assurance of permanence which I was seeking.

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 and other attacks, it would be naïve to take no time to ensure that actions on the ground and all the circumstances were consistent with the words of a declared ceasefire.

Incontrovertible evidence that the IRA had abandoned violence for good would secure Sinn Féin's rapid entry into the negotiations. Short of that, we would need to take some time to assess how far a new ceasefire was genuine and lasting, as the draft text I have given you suggests. That time would not, of course, be wasted. We could for example be ready to meet Sinn Féin to explore the nature of the ceasefire, what assurances could be given and what confidence-building measures established. Before Sinn Féin could 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 sufficiently up to speed with progress, to enable Sinn Féin to join the negotiations before we expect they will adjourn around

11 December for four weeks or so over Christmas. But it is open to Sinn Fein and the IRA to convince us otherwise by their words and actions.

I look forward to hearing from you with further news from Mr Adams about what will be said if a new ceasefire is declared.

John Hume Esq MP

John Hume Esq MP

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(1 November 1996)

Possible text in response to text of 10 October

This Government has made clear its approach to the search for peace in Northern Ireland on many occasions. But we continue to be asked about this or that aspect, particularly about the multi-party negotiations which started on 10 June in Belfast. There has been continued speculation about a new IRA ceasefire, despite the no-warning attack on Thiepval barracks, Lisburn and ^{various arms finds, including the latest huge arms} ~~and explosives~~ find in London. This has renewed questions about what effect this would have on the negotiations, and our approach to these negotiations. It may therefore be helpful to spell out our position again.

[The purpose of the negotiations is to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands.] [There is one overriding aim: to reach an overall political settlement, [including any new institutions and structures required to take account of the totality of these relationships] achieved through agreement and founded on consent.] *(The negotiations)*

They [The negotiations] will therefore address all the issues relevant to a settlement. Inclusive in nature, they involve both the British and Irish Governments and all the relevant political parties with the necessary democratic mandate and commitment to exclusively peaceful methods.

It is important to emphasise that all parties are treated equally in the negotiations, in accordance with the scale of their democratic mandate and the need for sufficient consensus. But no one party can prevent the negotiations continuing by withdrawing from them. No party has an undemocratic advantage. Both Governments intend that the outcome of these negotiations will be

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submitted for democratic ratification through referendums, North and South.

The prospects for success in these negotiations will obviously be much greater if they take place in a peaceful environment. The loyalist ceasefire has made an important contribution. It made it possible for the loyalist parties to join the negotiations. They are now playing their part in shaping Northern Ireland's future, as I acknowledged when I met their leaders in July.

Under the legislation setting up the talks, if there was an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, Sinn Féin would be invited to nominate a team to join the negotiations.

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PARAGRAPH) In the light of recent events, unless there were some incontrovertible developments supporting it, a dependable judgement that any restoration was indeed genuinely unequivocal could not be formed at once. Each atrocity deepens the credibility gap which Sinn Féin must address. Much would turn on whether words, actions and all the circumstances were consistent with the declared ceasefire. For example, whether or not any paramilitary activity, including surveillance, targetting and weapons preparation, continued would be relevant. Sufficient time would be taken to ensure that a well founded judgement could be made.

Beyond the unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, the British and Irish Governments are agreed that these negotiations are without preconditions.

It is equally 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

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violence or coercion. So, on entering the negotiations, each participant needs 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. The parties in the talks have all done just that already.

The range of issues on which an overall agreement will depend means that the negotiations will be on the basis of a comprehensive agenda. This will be adopted by agreement. Each participant will be able to raise any significant issue of concern to them, and to receive a fair hearing for those concerns, without this being subject to the veto of any other party. Any aspect can be raised, including constitutional issues and any other matter which any party considers relevant. No negotiated outcome is either predetermined or excluded in advance or limited by anything other than the need for agreement.

Among the crucial issues is decommissioning. So the opening plenary will address the International Body's proposals on decommissioning of illegal arms. In their report, the International Body said the parties should consider an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all-party negotiations. We and the Irish Government support this compromise approach. Agreement needs to be reached on how to take it forward, so that the process of decommissioning is not seen as a block to progress in the negotiations, but can be used to build confidence one step at a time during them. So both Governments have already said they will be looking for the commitment of all participants to work constructively during the negotiations to implement all aspects of the International Body's report.

It is essential that all participants negotiate in good faith, seriously address all areas of the agreed agenda and make every effort to reach a comprehensive agreement. For their part, the two