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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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WHITEHALL

LONDON SW1A 2AZ

John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

6 November 1996

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Dear John

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE: MEETING WITH TANAISTE

Following receipt of the Irish version of the text last night, the Secretary of State, accompanied by Sir David Fell, Mr Thomas, Mr Bell and Mr Hill met the Tanaiste this morning in Stormont House. Mr Spring was accompanied by Mrs Owen, Mr Gleeson, Mr O'hUiginn, Mr Dalton and Mr O'Donoghue.

Summary

2. The Irish confirm that any delay in inviting Sinn Fein into talks (for the sole purpose of signing up to the Mitchell Principles) after the declaration of a ceasefire, would be unacceptable to Adams because it would be undeliverable. Irish Ministers of the view that both Governments needed to act together and were not far apart; their officials spoke of the horrors of the alternative to a ceasefire, the historic opportunity which was on offer and how "criminal" it would be to miss it. They did not rule out the possibility of getting stronger language from Adams. We said that words alone were not enough to satisfy us that a ceasefire was unequivocal; we could not make a dependable judgement on that at once. A passage of time was needed. If necessary, we would publish our text. In the end, the gap was unbridgeable and it was agreed that the next step would probably be at Prime Minister/Taoiseach level.

Detail

3. The Secretary of State began by saying that, with the experience of the breakdown of the previous ceasefire and following the events of this year, he could not rely on words alone to satisfy himself that any ceasefire was unequivocal, or that it was intended to be for real rather than tactical. In order to be able to fulfil

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the requirements of paras 8 and 9 of the Ground Rules, in his view there needed to be time to make a well-founded judgement. It was desirable to have Sinn Fein in the process, and in the minimum time necessary. But there needed to be a lapse of time to corroborate their words - unless of course there was some sort of cataclysmic statement from the GAC which would put everything in a different light. Once they were in the talks they could not have any separate status. If the Irish Government shared that judgement, then there was merely a drafting problem.

4. The Tanaiste recognised the importance of the two Governments working together and co-ordinating their responses if possible. The Irish text was drafted on the basis that this would be required by Adams and the IRA in order to bring about the ceasefire which was clearly on offer. Fine tuning could be necessary up to the eleventh hour. Their best information was that Adams would not do anything until he knew what form the process would take. The process suggested was the best prospect the Irish saw to get the IRA to declare a ceasefire, get Sinn Fein into the political process, and sign up to Mitchell. Then a totally new scenario would develop with the ending of punishment beatings, surveillance and the rest. The safeguard in all of this, said Mrs Owen, was that, having signed up to Mitchell, the other participants could challenge them if they went back on these.

5. The Secretary of State pointed out, contrary to some stories he had heard, including from John Hume, that the British Government were not now insisting on a three-month period and had amended the draft text to reflect that. There needed to be a more definite indication of the words that would actually be used in any declaration of a ceasefire and he would also need to look at the actions and all the circumstances to see if they were consistent with it. The character of the language was important, but there must also be an absence of paramilitary activity. It was for that reason we could not accept the latest Irish text which envisaged Sinn Fein coming in immediately. Mr O'hUiginn said bluntly that on that basis there would be no deal. Mr Dalton argued that any period

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of time or sanitation period was not credible and confirmed that on that basis there would be no ceasefire. To a question from Sir David Fell he said that in his view there would be no deal if a judgement had to be made in a period of time.

6. Mr Thomas noted that expectations of some period of time elapsing had been conditioned in part by the Irish Government in that they had used the formulation of "some weeks". The British Government had not talked about a sanitation period but were looking for a time during which the words, actions and circumstances were consistent with the declaration of a ceasefire. The Secretary of State added that the quality of the language was important and if it was very good it could reduce the period which would need to be taken. Nothing would be stipulated in terms of a specific period. The Taoiseach himself had said it was necessary for them (Sinn Fein/IRA) to find the means to show and establish that the ceasefire was for real. Mr Gleeson commented that the Taoiseach's statements did not rule out language alone being sufficient.

7. Mr Dalton painted a stark scenario - on one hand there was a real prospect of a ceasefire and on the other the equally real and disturbing prospect of renewed and increased violence. In the absence of a ceasefire, the very best we could hope for would be a limited bombing campaign. On that scenario, he thought it was well worth taking a chance. The Tanaiste commented that the worst case scenario was to do nothing. To reasonable people, a period of time as described sounded grand, but in the Adams mindset, where he was trying to bring the organisation in from the cold, any delay, probation or similar device would be unacceptable. The Prime Minister had indicated that he was looking for words; it might be possible for these to be devised and to be significant. He thought Adams could deliver and possibly improve upon the language suggested in the Annex to their paper. He accepted that we were entitled to know this as a basis for going forward but reiterated that the difficulty was the delay period. The real difficulty was whether the invitation could be made; Adams would only encourage a declaration if it was guaranteed that he would get into the process immediately.

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8. The Secretary of State said he did not see this as a standoff period but it would be filled with positive action. Mr Gleeson pointed out that David Trimble had said recently that words were critical, not the period of time. Mr Thomas pointed out that the words used the last time were good (including a "definitive commitment" but did not hold up and our judgement on this occasion would have to take that into account. An indication of intention might be another way of improving language. To a comment from Mr Dalton about missing the chance for a ceasefire and that becoming public, the Secretary of State said he would have no difficulty in publishing our text as it now stood.

9. The Secretary of State continued that much of the judgement hung on the expression of intent. It would be helpful to him to know in what terms they would respond. The Tanaiste said that a month of best behaviour was no guarantee; even if all weapons were given up tomorrow that would be no guarantee of future action. He was assuming, on the basis of a ceasefire, that all actions would be off, including punishment beatings, surveillance, etc. He thought the two Governments were not far apart. The words used by the Prime Minister set a high standard. If the words were promised in advance, would that be good enough? The Secretary of State responded that if the words were of an incontrovertible nature, that would put a different complexion on it. Short of that however, words, while helpful, would not be enough on their own.

10. Mr O'hUiginn said that Adams felt strongly let down because Hume had not discussed either the text or the time frame with the Prime Minister. But Hume was with the Irish Government on this point - that an open-ended probation period was a "deal breaker". There was no possibility that the IRA would switch magically overnight, but clearly the opportunity for a ceasefire was historical in Irish terms. It would go back to back with the previous 18 months. The tide of history was against them (the IRA), they were on the tiger's back and wanted to get off and, in his view, it was criminal if they did not get help to get off.

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11. The Secretary of State responded vigorously, saying that we had to know if it was intended to be permanent. But the British Government could not be criminally gullible, given what happened before and the events since. Mr O'hUiginn quickly recanted - his reference to "criminal" was a metaphor for a terrible responsibility. The best hope after an unequivocal declaration of a ceasefire would be to allow Sinn Fein into negotiations, sign up to Mitchell and then vigilance could be exercised in what they do, their demeanour and other factors. Two years ago it would have been a dream to think that they would sign up to this. If the gate was now closed, the British would have no allies in all of this. Not for the first time, said the Secretary of State.

12. Finally, the Tanaiste said that it was possible to work on the language which might be used in the event of a ceasefire. The whole process had been structured to get them in. Everyone knew there would be a passage of time but it was necessary to get them in straightaway. He was pleasantly surprised by David Trimble's comments. Adams would want to know that there was a process to which he had access.

13. The Secretary of State said it was significant that they were talking of a ceasefire (to which the Tanaiste interjected, "they are close to it"); but of central importance was their intent. There could be no guarantee of future action, but the British Government held their view because it was right. Clearly drafting would not help if, as the Irish say, Adams would not put up with any delay. In the circumstances, it would seem that the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach should discuss what appeared to be a fundamental difference.

14. I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin.

(Signed)

W K LINDSAY

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