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From: John Holmes
Date: 25 February 1998

PRIME MINISTER

UDP

A reasonable NIO brief is attached, but the UDP press release immediately behind this minute tells you all you need to know about what they will be saying. You will recall that the aim of agreeing the meeting was to give the UDP an extra argument to dissuade the UDA from going back to violence. It seems to have worked for now, although the Loyalist ceasefire is obviously under strain and the recent bombs in Moira and Portadown have hardly helped.

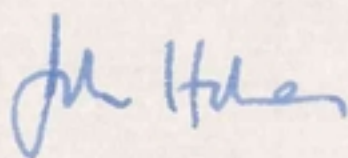
The fact of the meeting is the most important thing for the UDP, but they will want to say publicly that they have raised their concerns about unfair treatment with you. You will want to emphasise how much you welcome the UDP back to the talks, and the important role the Loyalists have to play in the negotiations.

I suggest the following answers to their three questions:

- (i) fully understand your concern about the apparently different treatment of Sinn Fein's expulsion. We have got you back in as fast as we could. Timescale for Sinn Fein reflected the closeness of the end of the talks, as well as Irish Government reluctance to throw them out at all;

- 2 -

- (ii) I am deliberately saying nothing about a meeting with Adams, but your point is fully taken;
- (iii) the next four or five weeks are crucial for the talks and must see a real effort to reach agreement. I need your help. Views on how to get agreement on a text?



JOHN HOLMES