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M. Pakenham

From the Principal Private Secretary

25 February 1998

*Dear Gen,*

### IRISH VIEWS

Paddy Teahon rang me this morning to give me a brief account of the Taoiseach's two-hour meeting yesterday with Adams, McGuinness and the Sinn Fein team. He said it had been a reasonable meeting, by the low-ish standards of these things. There had been a prickly initial exchange about who was at fault for Sinn Fein's expulsion, but this had not lasted too long. The Sinn Fein side had made a point of saying that they were in favour of going back into the talks and in favour of peace. But there had been several references to not every one of their colleagues agreeing. The Taoiseach had pushed them about recent bombs. He was not very happy if all we were getting was a different kind of violence. There had been hints from the Sinn Fein side that they would try to stop what was going on, if they could.

Teahon went on that Sinn Fein had got it into their heads that they would not go back into the talks until after they had seen the Prime Minister. Sinn Fein did not seem too fussed about whether this meeting was before or after 9 March, but would be hard to dissuade from insisting on a meeting. The Irish side were slightly worried that we might get into a prolonged stand-off, with Sinn Fein saying they would not go back into the talks until a meeting with the Prime Minister, and us saying the Prime Minister would not meet Adams until Sinn Fein were back in the talks. I said that I did not think this was particularly likely. We had not yet made up our minds, but one possibility was to set a date for a meeting shortly after 9 March.

Sinn Fein had also asked several worried questions about how far the Irish and British Governments had discussed and agreed details of a settlement. The Irish had explained that, although there were conversations at various levels, we did not yet have an agreed view of a detailed settlement.

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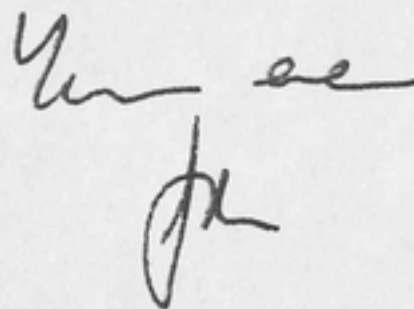
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Sinn Fein's other emphasis had been on the equality agenda, and the need for progress on this in parallel with progress on a political settlement. Sinn Fein almost seemed to attach more importance to this than to the political institutions involved in a settlement. Policing was clearly the most important and difficult of the issues. Teahon added that, from an Irish viewpoint, the policing problems could not be wished away through the establishment of a Commission. One way forward might be to set out some principles on which future policing could be based, for example distinguishing two levels: serious crime, which would be tackled on a Province-wide basis, and local policing, which could be done at a community level.

I said that we were well aware of the need for progress in these areas, in parallel to progress in the talks. As Teahon had said, policing was the most difficult issue, and anything which smacked of Sinn Fein being allowed to police Nationalist areas would certainly not run. But we were reflecting on this.

I am copying this letter to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir Christopher Meyer (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Holmes', with a stylized flourish below the name.

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq  
Northern Ireland Office

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