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JOINT PRESS STATEMENT BY THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS

The two Governments have together now reached our joint decision. After the most careful examination of all the material available to us, we have been obliged to conclude that the representations under Rule 29 are upheld and that Sinn Féin should not be allowed to participate in the Talks.

We have just met Sinn Féin to convey our decision personally to them; it is being made available to all the other participants in the Talks; and it is being published.

Great care has been taken by the Governments in arriving at their conclusions. Against the background of the three-day session of the talks in Dublin Castle this week, which allowed all parties, including Sinn Féin, the opportunity to state their views in full, the Governments wished to ensure that the fullest possible consideration was given to those views and to all the issues and factors involved.

There is little time left now until May. Both Governments are determined to work with the parties to produce a settlement over the coming six weeks. We want as many parties as possible - including Sinn Féin - to have the opportunity to contribute during this critical period.

Subject crucially to events on the ground and to convincing demonstration in word and deed that a complete, unqualified and unequivocal IRA ceasefire is being fully and continuously observed, it is the expectation of both Governments that Sinn Féin will be able to return to the talks on 9 March. We will maintain contacts with Sinn Féin in the meantime.

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In the case of the UDP, and now in the case of Sinn Féin, the Governments have been prepared, in the interests of inclusivity and rapid progress in the talks, to envisage a return to the talks at an early stage. However this approach could certainly not be maintained in the event of further violence by the organisations linked to these parties. The credibility of the process could not withstand such a further challenge. All parties should have no doubt about the two Governments' resolve in such circumstances.

In view of the nature of the procedures under which the Governments have made their determination on the case of Sinn Féin, they do not propose to comment further on its detail or outcome.

[Ends]