

SECRET

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....


Note

The Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and the Minister for Social Welfare met this afternoon to consider the request from Sinn Féin for a further meeting with officials.

The document herewith sets out the approach agreed as the Government's position.

It was noted that Mr. John Hume is to meet Mr. Gerry Adams on Friday. It was agreed that Mr. Seán O'hUiginn would seek to meet Mr. Hume before this meeting and convey the sense of the document herewith to Mr. Hume.

Further responses to Sinn Féin's request would be considered in the light of what happens in Mr. Hume's contact with Mr. Adams.


Taoiseach 7
8 January, 1996

The following is the Government's approach to the recent request for a meeting between officials and Sinn Féin.

As Sinn Féin knows, Ministerial contact with Sinn Féin was suspended once the IRA resumed its military campaign. Official level contact was, however, maintained "with a view to an early and permanent IRA ceasefire".

These meetings with officials have continued for almost a year now. They have not resulted in an IRA ceasefire, notwithstanding the fact that in the meantime the Irish Government obtained all-party talks, on a fixed date, in which Sinn Féin could have taken part, if there had been a ceasefire. The Irish Government also secured ground rules for these talks which protected the nationalist position, and the Irish Government has worked ceaselessly to overcome all remaining obstacles to agreement within these talks.

The Irish Government is willing to go to great lengths to secure peace and an IRA ceasefire, but it is not prepared to negotiate under threat of violence, especially violence apparently timed to coincide with meetings with its representatives.

On 20 December, the IRA undertook an attack in the Royal Victoria Children's Hospital while a pre-arranged meeting with Irish Government officials was actually taking place. In light of the failure of previous meetings with Sinn Féin to result in an IRA ceasefire, this type of event placed the officials, and the Government they represent, in an impossible position.

Sinn Féin's request for a further meeting, came on the same day as an IRA attack on the High Court in Belfast.

In light of this pattern, the Government is unable to agree to a further meeting, unless it first has reliable assurances from you that a ceasefire is actually imminent, and that identified and attainable things need to be discussed and done, that will achieve that end.

At the last meeting with officials, the possibility was raised of an approach to all of the parties in Britain, in relation to the admission of Sinn Féin to all party talks after a British General Election, on the basis of an early, unequivocal, and irrevocable IRA ceasefire.

This proposal has inherent difficulties, notably that it requires the agreement of a large number of potential participants. A Government in one country cannot, of course, negotiate with opposition parties in another. This would be contrary to the practice of international relations.

It is, on the other hand, open to parties in Westminster, and to Mr. John Hume, to pursue the possibility of such an agreement. But the prospects of such an agreement are not helped by continuing IRA violence, as you must fully understand. Nonetheless at an appropriate time, and in accordance with the normal conventions, the Irish Government would be happy to discuss the matter with the British Government.

But the Irish Government can only pursue this possibility with conviction, if we are satisfied that Sinn Féin is in a position to offer assurances that the necessary early, unequivocal and irrevocable ceasefire is genuinely imminent. Events during and after our last meeting have created an obvious difficulty for us in this regard. The Irish Government will invite Sinn Féin to reflect on these issues and respond to us in writing. Its response will enable the Government to consider the appropriateness of a meeting.

8 January, 1996