

**SECRET**

**Draft Speaking Note for Meeting**

**with Sinn Fein**

**(January 1997)**

1. The Government are extremely concerned at events since our last meeting. This anger has been expressed publicly by the Taoiseach and Tánaiste.
2. We had agreed at that last meeting to examine the ideas discussed at it for creating the basis for an early permanent IRA ceasefire. We had believed space could be made for that examination without IRA operations. We cannot understand how these incidents are compatible with the sentiments expressed by Sinn Fein at the December meeting.
3. Our purpose in requesting this meeting is to explore if there is any longer a basis for an early and permanent IRA ceasefire. The Government want to make clear that a tactical ceasefire for electoral purposes is of no value and would discredit the attempts at a genuine permanent end to violence.
4. The Government want Sinn Fein to agree to an alternative approach that acknowledges realistically that the most productive use of this interlude is to seek to lay the foundations for a better and reinvigorated talks process, once the election season is out of the way.

The first step should be the immediate and unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, in reassuring and confidence-enhancing terms.

This should be met with statements on behalf of the British Government and Opposition parties confirming that they will honour the commitments on the peace process between the British and Irish Governments which are on the record in the documents agreed between them.

Specifically they should commit themselves, subject only to the sustained observance of the ceasefires, to reconvene the Talks on a fully inclusive basis not later than end May/early June, irrespective of who forms the next British Government.

To forestall the prospect of a further indefinite stalemate in the transition to substantive talks, they should commit themselves to bring forward at that stage proposals for an agreed indicative time-frame, which would provide that the negotiations entered substantive issues, at a minimum as regards Strand Three issues between the two Governments and with the extensive consultative procedures envisaged with the parties, within a specified period.

It would further be understood that the essential goal of decommissioning would be pursued by the two Governments on the basis of the implementation of all aspects of the Mitchell Report, and that other than the observance of the ceasefire, and the necessary



confidence-building commitment to the Mitchell principles, the negotiations would be without preconditions.

An immediate and unequivocal IRA ceasefire on this basis would create the political space to begin to build a climate of enhanced confidence, which is at present so obviously the missing ingredient.

5. In practical terms Sinn Fein should now, within days, give a considered response saying that 4 above would provide the basis for an early - within 2 weeks - and permanent IRA ceasefire declared in unequivocal terms.
6. If Sinn Fein say they can do so then we await their considered response.
7. If Sinn Fein say "no", or a doubtful future "maybe", we tell them we see little further option on our side to make space.