

SECRET - PERSONAL

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From the Principal Private Secretary

25 March 1998

Dear Ken,

INTENSIFYING THE NEGOTIATIONS

The Prime Minister was grateful for Dr Mowlam's minute of 24 March about George Mitchell's ideas for reaching a text to be tabled in the talks, and how they relate to what the Taoiseach proposed to the Prime Minister on the telephone. The Prime Minister accepts that we now have little choice but to engage with the Irish on texts in most areas of the negotiations, to see how far we and they can reach agreement, and therefore what kind of texts we can offer to Mitchell. This exercise should of course remain confidential. Presumably we would not be negotiating bilaterally with the Irish about Strand 1 issues, although they are of course closely interested, not least because of the read-across to Strand 2. The Prime Minister also believes that it would be best to continue our discussions on North-South issues in the way we have been doing hitherto - in this area, above all, agreement between ourselves and the Irish alone will not necessarily advance the negotiations and could easily set them back. I am sending back to Teahon ideas on their latest draft (your letter of 24 March) and the Prime Minister will also need to talk to Trimble again in detail about all this when they meet tomorrow. I believe it has meanwhile been agreed that we should give a copy of our latest text to Senator Mitchell, on a confidential basis, with the Irish doing the same (although Teahon sounded a bit doubtful when I spoke to him this afternoon).

I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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