

FROM: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



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John Holmes Esq.
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister
No. 10 Downing Street
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23 March 1998

Dear John,

CO-ORDINATING GROUP ON A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT: FOURTH MEETING

The Group held its fourth meeting on Thursday.

We are continuing to work on a series of papers to be tabled at the talks, some jointly with the Irish, in the three weeks remaining before Easter. These are intended to focus the parties' attention on resolving the key outstanding issues. British and Irish officials will meet shortly to finalise papers on Strands 2 and 3.

My Secretary of State's US visit provided a useful opportunity to reinforce the Government's messages. However, there is still some way to go: our focus group research shows a lack of public awareness and interest in the referendum, and deep fears in both communities. We will continue to tackle the causes of this in our public messages, and will emphasise the progress made in the talks. In connection with the latter, the possibility of daily media briefings by Senator Mitchell is being explored.



The other key points of the meeting were as follows:

- **elections:** work on drafting the Order is nearing completion;
- **police reform:** there is growing support inside and outside the talks for a Commission on police reform: work on refining the proposal will continue;
- **decommissioning:** British and Irish officials are working on a joint paper to be tabled for discussion by the Liaison Sub-committee on decommissioning next week;
- **rights:** we will table a paper next week;
- **equality:** papers on the Irish language and flags and emblems will be tabled shortly;
- **parades:** the Lower Ormeau Concerned Residents are seeking a judicial review of the recent appointments to the Parades Commission;
- **normalisation:** a paper will be tabled for discussion in the Liaison Sub-Committee on confidence building measures next week;
- **Bloody Sunday:** the Saville Tribunal did not hold their planned press conference in London this week, preferring not to distract attention from their visit to Londonderry on 3 April;



NIO post-settlement: officials are working up options based on two possible scenarios: firstly, the NIO retaining all reserved powers after devolution; or secondly, elements of the criminal justice system and prisons also being devolved in the first instance;

- **NI Departments post-settlement:** officials are examining the options for splitting the NI Departments into different Ministries.

Updated critical path analyses are attached.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'W K Lindsay'.

W K LINDSAY