

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
11 MILLBANK
LONDON
SW1P 4QE

*File
31/3*

*no
record*
by fax?
C: PB
JPO
AC

John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

26 March 1998

Dear John,

PARADES COMMISSION: PRELIMINARY VIEW

In my letter of 22 March I indicated that the Parades Commission was to meet on 23 March to consider the timing of the announcement of its preliminary view on a number of contentious parades.

At its meeting the Commission decided to postpone the announcement until 23 April. We understand that this decision was taken in light of advice from the Commission's authorised officers on the ground, that scope remained for progress to be made towards possible accommodation in relation to a number of contentious parades. The Commission felt that an early announcement of the preliminary view might inhibit such progress. The potential effect of the timing of the announcement on the Talks process did not, we understand, form part of the discussion at the meeting and was not a contributory factor to the decision.

The Commission intends to issue a press statement on Monday 30 March which will say that the preliminary view will be published "in the week of 20 April". Inevitably, given that this was expected at the end of March, there will be speculation about why it has been postponed. While the statement will explain that the timing of the announcement is related solely to the need to give the Commission sufficient time to complete its consideration of all of the issues involved in relation to the parades to be covered by the announcement, we might expect the usual



allegations of Government interference. Our line on this will be that it is entirely a matter for the Parades Commission, as an independent body, to decide when to announce its preliminary view; and that neither Ministers nor officials have made any representations to the Commission about the timing of the announcement. My Secretary of State feels that these latest developments bear out the wisdom of our decision not to interfere with the Commission's consideration of this issue.

In addition to deciding to postpone the announcement, the Commission has also delayed taking decisions about the precise content of the package.

*Yours ever,
Ken*

W K LINDSAY