

CONFIDENTIAL



Dear Tony,

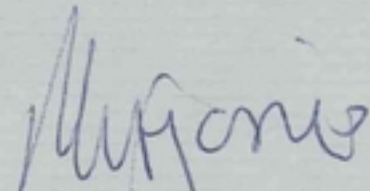
Prime Minister

POLICE COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

I am writing to keep you and colleagues informed of the progress of our discussions in Talks on this important issue. Paul Murphy chaired a useful and low key meeting on Wednesday afternoon, including Sinn Fein. There is strong support for the concept of a Commission from the Nationalists; and whilst the UUP were lukewarm, Reg Empey as their spokesman took care not to rule out the idea of a Commission, but simply to express reservations about an "international" one. We should take forward the discussion in Strand 1 bilaterals, in an informal manner next week. We should so far as possible avoid any discussion of policing in the Confidence Building Sub-Committee of Plenary, where Irish involvement at this early stage would irritate the Unionists and might lead to unhelpful discussion on the lack of decommissioning and continuing terrorist activity, and the constraints this places on 'normal' policing. We are however beginning to discuss with the Irish in the context of shaping the overall agreement how we, at this stage, see policing and criminal justice issues being taken forward.

Whilst we need to have a paper on the concept of a Commission ready to table, if there is a demand for one, I would prefer to keep the approach flexible for the time being. However, I attach for colleagues' information a revised draft of the paper (including outline Terms of Reference) prepared (but not used) last week, for tabling if required. This has been amended in line with comments I received, to make it clear that we do not intend to give the Commission the remit of looking at any part of the criminal justice system except policing; and that those other aspects of criminal justice will be dealt with by a Government review, rather than by a Commission.

I am copying this to IN colleagues, the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales, and to Sir Richard Wilson.


 MARJORIE MOWLAM

31 March 1998

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