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From: John Holmes
Date: 30 March 1998

PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

You are seeing Hume tomorrow. I have sent him in advance the attached Strand 1 paper, which is a slightly modified version of what we were discussing with Trimble on Sunday.

Because your meeting with Trimble leaked, and you are meeting the SDLP tomorrow, you need to speak to the other main party leaders on the phone tomorrow or on Wednesday, starting with Adams. There are gaps during the day tomorrow and we will try to fit them in as we can. We can discuss each call before it happens.

But your first call of the day, at 0915, is to George Mitchell, to compare notes and re-establish contact. He swings between gloom and optimism, like the rest of us, but is determined to make an agreement happen on time if he can. He was apparently a bit depressed on Sunday evening after reading the full texts of ourselves and the Irish (minus the North-South bits) and seeing the gap still to be covered but has cheered up a bit since.

His current plan is to work up a synthesis text on Thursday with a view to tabling it on Friday, so that the intense negotiations can then begin, perhaps with a pause over the weekend while parties absorb the text. Ideally he wants to have an agreed British-Irish text as the basis for his synthesis. We have made clear we will agree as much as we can with the Irish but cannot guarantee to agree

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

everything. Some issues are of course much more for us than the Irish anyway. In fact joint work on texts has gone well so far in some areas.

You will want to brief him on your commitment, on where you think Trimble is, and your plans for a real session with Ahern on Wednesday night, which should fit his timetable. You might also reassure him that you are not proposing to take over Chairmanship of the talks, as some of the press speculated over the weekend, and that you have no fixed plans to come to Belfast, though you stand ready to do so next week whenever this looks like being helpful (probably at the end).



JOHN HOLMES

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