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FROM: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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JL 17/12

17 December 1996

Dear John,

CONVERSATION WITH JOHN HUME

After the plenary session ended today, John Hume called to see the Secretary of State and Michael Ancram. I was present for some, but not all, of the conversation.

Mr Hume conveyed a number of misgivings which the republican movement had - such as the fact that entry into Talks could last 18 months; after meetings with officials the bilaterals with parties could go on forever, particularly if the parties did not want to meet them; they were annoyed at the Prime Minister describing the last ceasefire as 'fake'; they thought, and he agreed, that the situation in relation to the Talks and the entry of Sinn Fein was more to do with electoral politics and therefore nothing would be done until after the election. Adams had said to Hume - tell them to call our bluff. The Secretary of State responded that, they, Sinn Fein/IRA, should call the Government's bluff and reinstate their ceasefire.

The Secretary of State recalled that the Prime Minister had said last week that we were not seeking undue delay in the process; equally we could not put a date on when Sinn Fein would be invited into Talks following a ceasefire. This depended on the words they used and their actions and

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inactions. He had to satisfy himself in the terms of the legislation that it was a genuine and credible ceasefire. There was no question of the other parties holding the process up just because they would not talk to Sinn Fein. As to electoral politics, there were no deals with the Ulster Unionists.

Mr Hume tried a different tack. Suppose he were to get Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown to go to the Prime Minister and the three of them make a statement together. Nothing in his proposed statement went beyond Government policy; he had even changed "creation" of a policing service to "development". Asked by the Secretary of State about the recent potential attack on the security forces in Duncairn Gardens, the find of mortars in West Belfast plus the 30 or so incendiary devices, and how this squared with a commitment to peace, Mr Hume said that these things were going on because there was no ceasefire and, in the republican movement's terms, the 'army' was still in being. There was clearly a substantial decrease in actual activity compared to previous years of an IRA campaign.

Becoming more passionate in his approach, Mr Hume said there had been 10 Secretaries of State and how many of them achieved even one week of a ceasefire? Yet we had 18 months and could have more. Sinn Fein knew that they must come into Talks on the terms of Articles 8 and 9 of the Ground Rules. If his paper of 10 October was published people would be amazed at how far the republican movement had come - there was no mention of a united Ireland or victory - but there was mention of confidence-building measures being a two-way street.



Michael Ancram pointed to the irony of the fact that if the IRA had not ended their ceasefire in February, Sinn Fein could have been in Talks on 10 June like everyone else. Mr Hume argued that, even if a new ceasefire was tactical and only lasted for one year, at least a number of people would be alive who would not otherwise have been. The Secretary of State said there was a limit to what the Government could agree to and there was no point in having a ceasefire at any price if, as a result, there was no-one left in the Talks. The Government had no reason to spin the process of entry for Sinn Fein out and there was every merit in coming to a conclusion on Articles 8 and 9 quickly, but in a way that would retain the confidence of others.

Referring to the statement that he had given to both you and me on 6 December, Mr Hume said that it should be noted that there was a huge change in the wording from even a couple of years ago and it was no longer a 'Brits Out' document. Asked whether this would apply to the IRA, Mr Hume said that the IRA would be "totally bound by Adams" as he was their political leader.

Mr Hume then made a comment about the present situation being similar to what De Valera had done with Fianna Fail when their weapons were dumped voluntarily. The Secretary of State was interested to hear this - did Hume think that Sinn Fein/IRA would say they would dump their guns? It would be highly significant if they would, though the Irish had maintained it was inconceivable except as part of a final settlement. Mr Hume said the debate on decommissioning created a surrender mentality for the republican movement and that was where the difficulty arose. He checked the question again - when the IRA declare



a ceasefire would they also declare that they were dumping their guns - he said he would put that to them.

The Secretary of State said that would be a most significant statement but Mr Hume should understand he was not negotiating - he was simply picking up on something Mr Hume had said. We were not particularly concerned about how weapons were dumped so long as it could be verified. But clearly this would be a major change if they were to say that.

The conversation ended at this point with Mr Hume going off to ask Adams if the IRA would say that they would dump their weapons. One can only guess at the response he will get. I am copying this to William Ehrman (FCO), Colin Budd (Cabinet Office) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Yours ever,

Ken

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