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FROM: T HALLETT
10 December 1996

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/Malcolm Moss (DHSS, DOE & L) - B
PS/Baroness Denton (DED, DANI & L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Priestly - B
Mr Hill (B&L) - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Ms Mapstone - B
Mr Whysall (B&L) - B
Ms Collins, Cab Off (via IPL) - B
Mr Dickinson, TAU - B
Mr Lamont, RID FCO - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Mrs McNally (B&L) - B
Mr Holmes, No 10

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

SUMMARY: 10 DECEMBER

The day's business consisted of a short plenary session and bilaterals with the UUP, the Women's Coalition, the Irish Government and the SDLP.

At the plenary session, Chairman Holkeri proposed an immediate adjournment to allow for further bilaterals to explore the possibility of resolving the decommissioning issue before the Christmas break. This found general acceptance from all except Mr Taylor, for the UUP, who argued that there should be no meetings next week because of the pressure of Parliamentary business at

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Westminster and because there was no prospect of reaching agreement. After discussion, the Chairman ruled that the talks should continue next week and adjourned the plenary to 12 noon on Monday, 16 December.

At the meeting with the UUP, the Secretary of State stressed the importance of trying to reach agreement on the decommissioning issue before the Christmas break. The UUP appeared to agree and reported that progress was being made in their discussions with the SDLP. The key unresolved issue was whether confidence-building measures should be discussed in the proposed sub-committee.

The Women's Coalition requested a meeting with Michael Ancram to discuss their concerns at the British Government's position on the terms of entry for Sinn Féin, which were seen in Nationalist circles as raising additional hurdles. Michael Ancram robustly defended the British Government's stance.

The Irish Government sought reassurance that the UUP were negotiating seriously. Their impression was that this was not so. Michael Ancram said that our impression was that the UUP genuinely were seeking agreement on decommissioning and that they wished the talks process to continue. Mr O'hUiginn's evident pessimism about the prospects for progress did not seem to be shared by Minister Coveney.

The SDLP reported good progress in their discussions with the UUP and confirmed that the key issue to be resolved was the handling of confidence-building measures. The problem, however, as before, was that the UUP tended to field different participants at each meeting and agreements apparently reached with one set of interlocutors were not necessarily endorsed by others. The intention was to present the Independent Chairman and the two Governments at the end of tomorrow with a statement of progress made and areas of potential agreement.

Signed:

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