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**FAKED**  
To HMA Dublin - LSC  
9/12 10:25

From the Private Secretary

9 December 1996

Dear Ted,

I talked to Paddy Teahon last night about the press handling at today's Summit. He suggested to me a few sentences which the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach might be able to use. I have had a word with the Prime Minister. He continues to believe that it would be extremely difficult to find language which we can both agree. This can obviously be discussed, but the Prime Minister's preference remains for no joint language as such, but agreement on the way in which the press will be handled.

I sent Paddy Teahon a draft of what the Prime Minister might be able to say. The Prime Minister has had another look at this, and revised it further slightly. I attach the result, which you may want to pass to Paddy Teahon on his arrival. These are not words written in stone, but an attempt to set out in positive language the message of the statement of 28 November, which the Prime Minister repeated in his television interview yesterday.

Yours ever  
John

JOHN HOLMES

His Excellency Mr Ted Barrington

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**PRIME MINISTER'S LINE AT  
9 DECEMBER PRESS CONFERENCE**

I set out the Government's position on the possibility of Sinn Fein joining the Belfast talks in a statement on 28 November.

It is perfectly clear. There is an absolute requirement for an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. Both Governments are quite clear about that. It is spelt out in the Ground Rules for the talks.

The same Ground Rules also require all parties taking part in the negotiations to establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and show that they abide by the democratic process. Both Governments are agreed that these requirements must be satisfied before Sinn Fein can join the talks.

What our statement of 28 November did was to make clear what we shall be looking for. We are not interested in a phoney or tactical ceasefire, to be discarded again when it suits. So what is needed is for any ceasefire to be declared in terms which can convince us that this time it is meant to last, and that Sinn Fein are indeed genuinely committed to the democratic process and exclusively peaceful means.

We also need more than words. Actions on the ground need to show that the IRA are adhering to both the ceasefire and the Mitchell principles, in particular through the absence of the kind of paramilitary activity which continued throughout the last ceasefire - targeting, surveillance and weapons preparation - and which is simply not compatible with a dependable and genuine ceasefire intended to be for good and with exclusively peaceful means. This is no more than common sense.

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We have said sufficient time will be needed to establish that these criteria for a genuinely unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire are being met. But how soon Sinn Fein can join the talks after a ceasefire depends on the IRA and Sinn Fein and what they say and do. So we cannot fix a date for Sinn Fein to enter the talks which pays no regard to what is said or done. What matters is whether the criteria are met, not the time period.

We are not looking to delay Sinn Fein's entry into the negotiations by a day longer than necessary, if we can be satisfied that the requirements I have set out are being met. Suggestions that we will be insisting on a long period of many months are not true. An invitation to Sinn Fein to join the talks can issue within a reasonable timescale if, and I emphasise again that this is the crucial point, if our requirements are convincingly met and can be seen to be met.

That is not in our hands but in the hands of the IRA and Sinn Fein. They can open the door to joining the talks. It all depends on them. The only way forward is for them to declare a ceasefire as soon as possible and convince us that this time it is genuine, dependable and lasting. A ceasefire now would give everyone time over the natural Christmas break to reflect on the new situation.