

6. Dec. 1996 19:54

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722  
From: ~~THE PRIVATE SECRETARY~~

No. 2447 P. 2/5

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE  
WHITEHALL  
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

cc: Eo

JH

BUg.

File  
JL 9/12.

John Holmes Esq  
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
LONDON  
SW1A 2AA

6 December 1996

Dear John,

**PRESS LINE FOR THE SUMMIT**

You asked for our comments on the form of words that the Prime Minister might use at Monday's Summit and show to the Irish in advance.

I attach a revised draft with some suggested amendments.

Among the more minor points:

- the requirement set in the Ground Rules and therefore linked to the legislation is for "an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994";
- the Secretary of State's role, under the legislation, is to invite the parties to nominate their negotiating team. The legislation is silent on who actually issues the invitation to this team to participate in the negotiations. The practice adopted before 10 June, which would need to be followed were an invitation to issue to Sinn Fein, was for the actual invitation to participate to issue from both Governments. This is a point of some sensitivity with the Irish. The language we suggest avoids unnecessarily ruffling their feathers;

**CONFIDENTIAL**

6. Dec. 1996

19:54

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

No. 2447 P. 3/5

- we have used some of the Taoiseach's language about the need to adhere to the ceasefire and the Mitchell principles;
- we fear that if you only rule out a period as long as 12 or 18 months, that will be taken as confirmation by nationalists that we do envisage a period up to 12 months. So we have suggested a rather vaguer formulation.

The crucial issue is how strong a hint to give about the "relatively short timescale" and with that in mind, you might want to consider the following points:

- as Trimble acknowledged to you, he has rather undercut our position with the Americans by admitting - more than once - to Lake that he could live with an indication, if the criteria were met, that Sinn Fein could be in the talks "within a few weeks". He has repeated this position in public;
- under the legislation, once the requirements are met the Secretary of State has no discretion: he must issue his invitation. So it is more accurate to say 'If the requirements are met, an invitation will issue etc';
- the Irish Government will be looking for the Prime Minister to repeat the sort of hint he gave in his letter to the Taoiseach of 22 November, when he said that a ceasefire now would mean that "Christmas then offers a natural break over which all can reflect on the new situation". Michael Ancram has commented that this is probably covered by your suggested reference to the Taoiseach's timescale.

Amendments to reflect the comments above are underlined in the text attached.

*Yours ever,*  
*Ken*  
W K LINDSAY  
CONFIDENTIAL

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 ceasefire genuinely intended to be for good and with exclusively peaceful means. This is no more than common sense.

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 early 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 speculate upon a date for Sinn Fein to enter the talks. [What matters is whether the criteria are met, not the time period.]



6. Dec. 1996 19:55

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722  
CONFIDENTIAL

No. 2447 P. 5/5

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 have no basis in reality. An invitation to Sinn Fein to join the talks would issue within a relatively short timescale if, and only if, and I emphasise again that this is the crucial point, the requirements are convincingly met.

That is not in our hands but in the hands of the IRA and Sinn Fein. The way is open for them to join the talks if they choose to take it. This could be in the early part of the New Year. The sort of timescale the Taoiseach has talked of is by no means ruled out. But it all depends on the IRA and Sinn Fein. If they meet the criteria, then they will be there. So 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.

CONFIDENTIAL