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HUME/ADAMS : IRISH REACTIONS TO PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT  
SUMMARY

1. Government makes public its displeasure at the Prime Minister's statement and issues statement setting out their own approach. Main opposition party characterise the Prime Minister's statement as a "studied rebuff". Media coverage more balanced, with the main message - that the onus remains upon the IRA to restore an unequivocal ceasefire - coming through.

DETAIL

2. The Prime Minister's statement to the House of Commons yesterday dominated debate in the political arena and in the media. The Irish Government moved quickly to put its own position on the record, issuing the statement in MIFT (faxed to NIO).

3 The Irish Government also went on to express publicly their disquiet at the timing of the statement. In speaking to journalists, the Taoiseach described the Prime Minister's statement as "an explanation of the Government's thinking" and not an "authoritative statement." If an authoritative statement was to be made, it would have to be made by the two Governments acting together. He went on to say said that he and the Prime Minister were determined to overcome differences, because they shared the common objective of a durable and credible ceasefire.

4 The Tanaiste went slightly further in his public comments, telling journalists that "in an ideal world, the statement should not have been issued until it was clear that it would reach the desired result." He went on to say that the Irish Government would see if they could bridge the gap in the

coming days.

5 Bertie Ahern, the leader of Fianna Fail characterised the Prime Minister's statement as a "studied rebuff". The British Government had added a list of new preconditions for Sinn Fein's entry to talks. The British Government were once again wilfully ignoring the solution offered by Senator Mitchell, and were putting their own survival at Westminster ahead of peace in Ireland. Meanwhile both the Democratic Left leader, Proinsias de Rossa and the Progressive Democrats' spokesman on Northern Ireland, Des O'Malley took a much more emollient line, the latter characterising the statement as "reasonable".

6. With the exception of RTE, which has pushed the line that the Prime Minister's statement is an attempt to erect further pre-conditions for Sinn Fein's entry to talks, the Irish media have adopted a generally moderate and realistic tone, with little overt criticism. The Irish Times editorial of 29 November began by saying that "The ball, to paraphrase the (Irish) Government last night, is now at the feet of the Republican movement." While commenting that there was deep uncertainty in the Republic about the wisdom of the British statement, it concluded that "Sinn Fein is on shaky ground if it insists that it is being asked to accept the British Government's terms, because, before and after the IRA ceasefire was ended, the ground rules were changed at Sinn Fein's specific demand."

7. The Irish Independent, in its editorial headed "Door to peace still open", argues that the Prime Minister's statement "should not cause an upsurge in pessimism". It merely reiterated the position of a Government which was fooled once, but does not intend to be fooled again. Varying the sporting metaphors, it concludes that "the ball remains, as ever, in the IRA court".

#### COMMENT

8 In view of the pressure on the Irish Government to be seen to secure a reinstatement of the IRA ceasefire, their sharp public reaction to the Prime Minister's statement was predictable. More encouraging has been the more even-handed response of much of the Irish media. Given the propensity of the Dublin media to follow the Irish Government's line, we took

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the precaution of briefing the briefers in the Government Press Office, as well as individual journalists, and appear to have had some success.

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