



ARCHDIOCESE OF ARMAGH

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29/11

Dear Prime Minister,

Please forgive me for troubling you with another letter at a time when you must be under almost intolerable pressure from many directions about so many problems. Not least of these is the Northern Ireland peace process, and it is again about this that I write.

I merely wish to be allowed to offer encouragement in the great efforts which I know you are personally making to keep some constructive dialogue going with Sinn Féin. The dialogue has naturally to be indirect, but it seems to me to be absolutely vital. Not least of its merits is that it keeps dialogue going within the republican movement itself; and this dialogue seems to me at this time to be singularly positive and promising.

I am convinced, indeed, that the modern republican movement is tantalisingly close to a break of historic significance with their inherited and long-established armed force tradition. This would represent a turning point in Irish and in Anglo-Irish history. I believe we are on the verge of a final abandonment of "armed struggle" by the modern republican movement, and of a definitive commitment by that movement to the peaceful and democratic process.

This is why I am so happy that you have not rejected out of hand the present republican proposals, but, as I see it, have left the door open for further exchanges. The present time is a critical one; indeed these weeks before Christmas seem to me to be a time of unprecedented opportunity for a renewed, and at this time a definitive and permanent ceasefire. But if the opportunity is missed, the future for Northern Ireland could be very bleak indeed.

I am very conscious of the great risks entailed on the Government's side. The "peace dividend", however, even politically, is sure to be very great. I doubt whether any political leader in Ireland (except inevitably Dr. Paisley) would want to be the person blameable for destroying the possibility of peace.

Above all, the Prime Minister who would deliver that "peace dividend" would certainly earn a place in history as the one who finally achieved a definitive ending to armed political violence in Ireland. It is in no sense of idle flattery that I say that no-one deserves to have that place more than you do. No-one has done more to promote the cause of peace in Ireland than you have, and no-one has come closer to finally achieving it than you have. You have many earnest prayers and good wishes throughout Ireland for what remains to be done.

With renewed assurance of my own prayers and my sincere good wishes for yourself personally and for your family at Christmastide and during the New Year,

Yours sincerely,

+ Cahal B. Card. Daly

+ Cahal B. Cardinal Daly

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