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Meeting with Harri Holkeri, Member of the International Body, 14 December 1995

1. Mr. Harri Holkeri, the Finnish member of the International Body, met with Secretary Ó hUiginn on 14 December 1995. Mr. Timo Kantola, an aide to Holkeri, as well as Mr. Paul Hickey, D/Justice and the undersigned were present.
2. Mr. Holkeri expressed appreciation for the opportunity of the briefing and his previous contact with Ambassador Ó Ceallaigh in Helsinki. Secretary Ó hUiginn reiterated the Government's appreciation for Holkeri's willingness to take up this appointment and referred to close links between Ireland and Finland in peacekeeping etc.. In response to Holkeri's indication at the outset that he had little knowledge of the background, Secretary Ó hUiginn gave an account of the historical background to the Northern Ireland problem and of the decommissioning issue in that context. He made clear that successive Irish Governments have completely opposed violence and that the objective now is to consolidate the total cessation of violence.
3. Holkeri was clearly interested in the broader context. He mentioned that he had brought a large number of works on Irish history with him. He also remarked that, although he had no connection with Ireland before, he would expect that his interest in the country would now be ongoing. His view of the Body's role is that its task is to reinforce the momentum established by the two Governments. Although the Irish situation could not be directly compared with other experiences, he had drawn some ideas from a discussion last Saturday in New York with UN disarmament experts. He added that he personally sees "some value" in the tight timescale given to the Body.
4. Among questions/issues raised by Holkeri, and to which Secretary Ó hUiginn assisted by Mr. Hickey gave full responses, were the following:
 - What the "decommissioning" term means and the distinction, between it and "disarmament".
 - The command structure of the IRA.
 - Whether there is any criminal involvement on the part of IRA members (Holkeri assumed that there is such involvement by Loyalist paramilitaries).
 - Would there be an amnesty for those handing in arms?
 - How would decommissioning operate in practice?
5. Holkeri indicated that a concern for human rights would form an important part of his approach to the task in hand. In conclusion he expressed appreciation for the letter he had received from the Taoiseach and mentioned that he had received also received a letter from the British Prime Minister. Secretary Ó hUiginn assured him that we stood ready to assist him and his staff in any way which they would feel useful in the discharge of their independent role.

Colm Ó Floinn/15 December 1995

cc PST, PSS, Secretary Ó hUiginn, Counsellors AI, Mr. McIntyre (file), Joint Secretary, Ambassadors - Washington, - London, - PMUN New York, - Ottawa, - Helsinki (SFax), Mr. S. Hare D/Taoiseach, Mr. P. Hickey D/Justice, Box

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Ambasáid na hÉireann
Embassy of Ireland



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Irlannin Suurlähetystö
Irlands Ambassad

Secure Fax:

5 December 1995

For: A/S Seán Ó hUiginn,
Anglo-Irish Division

From: O'Ceallaigh

Mr. Harri Holkeri

You asked for a pen picture of Mr. Harri Holkeri.

Born in 1937 he is from a rural background where his father was a policeman. He has a masters degree in political science. He has been involved in the Kokoomus Party, which is variously translated as Conservative or National Coalition Party, since his university days and from 1959 to 1971 he was youth secretary, information secretary, research secretary and eventually Party Secretary of Kokoomus. He was leader of the Party from 1971-79 and a member of Parliament from 1970-78. Since 1978 he has been a member of the Board of the Bank of Finland. Kokoomus was in opposition from the mid-sixties until 1987 when the then President, Mauno Koivisto, a social Democrat and former Governor of the Bank of Finland, invited Mr. Holkeri to form a coalition government with the Social Democrats which he led from 1987 to 1991, returning to the Bank of Finland when the Government changed to one led by the Centre Party.

Mr. Holkeri is a quiet spoken well regarded elder politician. He is not known for flamboyance but is seen as a solid middle of the road cautious person. He has a commitment to duty and when asked to join the International Body he saw it as his duty to respond positively given the honour being done to Finland. He is personally a little anxious that his knowledge

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of the issues is not great and hence his strong desire for support from the Finnish official institutions. He understands English well but is a little hesitant in speaking it.

When I visited him to-day in company with the British Ambassador he said that he had received great encouragement from the positive reaction of the Finnish public to his appointment. He said he intends to be a listener. He does not propose to respond to the press on the substance of the matter in which he is now engaged.

To sum up he is by nature a listener and a persuader who generally shuns publicity in favour of seeking compromise.

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