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5 October 1995

Mr Sean O hUiginn
Second Secretary
Anglo Irish Division
Dept of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

Dear Second Secretary

Per Body

The Tanaiste's remarks on 15 December 1993

It may be useful to draw together a number of references which British Ministers have made over recent weeks, both in public and in private, to remarks made by the Tanaiste in the Dail on 15 December 1993.

As you know, it was an article by Paul Bew in the summer issue of Parliamentary Brief which first drew the attention of the British Government to these remarks. It is worth noting that the remarks were evidently deemed of no significance in the trawling exercise which British officials carried out some months ago in order to equip their Ministers with responses to claims made by Albert Reynolds about the position of the two Governments at the time of the Joint Declaration.

Copies of the Bew article were widely disseminated in the British system. In my introductory calls on Michael Ancram and Sir John Wheeler (18-19 September), the quotation was produced with a flourish within minutes of my arrival.

I responded to the Ministers as previously reported. I pointed out that these remarks had related to a context in which the IRA's response to the Joint Declaration might have been limited to a temporary cessation of violence. In the event, however, the IRA had gone for a permanent cessation of violence and entirely different considerations applied in that context. The Tanaiste had made clear his commitment to the goal of decommissioning but had not made any statement about the timing of this process nor had he described decommissioning as in any way a precondition for admission to political talks.

Speaking in Canberra on 20 September, the Secretary of State expressed himself in terms which deliberately echoed the Tanaiste's remarks - but which rearranged the latter in order to suit British purposes:

"A temporary cessation of violence to see what the political process offered would not be

enough. The cessation of violence had to be permanent, and as to how the permanence of a declared cessation of violence was to be determined, we both made it clear that we were talking about the handing up of weapons".

This distorted version - presented as the position of both Governments - linked the two elements (a permanent cessation of violence and the handing up of weapons) more closely than the Tanaiste had done.

In a press interview on the same day, the Secretary of State offered a further variant (though admittedly he did not describe this as the precise quotation). He said that the Tanaiste had told the Dail that "the Governments are determined that there shall not be just a temporary cessation of violence to give the political process a whirl to see what that yields. There has to be a handing up of weapons so that people can be sure that a permanent peace is intended". The significance of this quotation, he pointed out to the Australian media, was that it was wrong for people to claim that the British Government had only focussed on this point after the ceasefire. The Tanaiste's remarks had been made eight months prior to the ceasefire.

It is worth noting that David Trimble also misquoted the Tanaiste in his first major speech as UUP leader (22 September). He represented the Tanaiste as having told a press conference (sic) on 15 December 1993 that

"we are talking about a permanent cessation of violence and we are talking about a handing up of arms....."

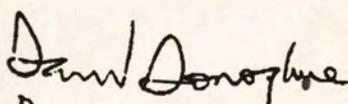
A more serious distortion of the Tanaiste's remarks was contained in a speech delivered by the Secretary of State in New Zealand on 27 September:

"Representatives from both Governments made it very clear after the Downing Street Declaration and before the ceasefires that weapons would have to be handed up before all-party talks could properly begin".

The most recent quotation of the remarks was in the right of reply delivered by the UK representative in the General Assembly on 28 September. They were invoked as a reflection of the British Government's approach and specifically of its view that "there should be some actual decommissioning of arms as a tangible, confidence-building measure and to signal the start of a process".

I have taken up these various abuses of the Tanaiste's remarks and will continue to do so. There is obviously a high degree of opportunism in the use being made of them. It might be useful if an occasion could be found for the Tanaiste to set the record straight in public and to demonstrate the consistency of the Government's position on these various issues.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue
Joint Secretary