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THE PRIME MINISTER
CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL

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Handwritten signature
7/7/97

by Nolan
[The clearly
results from clearing-up
operations]
Handwritten signature
7.7.97

11 June 1997

Dear John,

It was good to talk to you on the phone earlier this week, and to share our concerns about renewed IRA violence. The attack on an Army patrol yesterday, and today's killing of a Loyalist terrorist, only increase my fears, although the responsibility for the latest incident is not yet clear.

As you know, I want to get Sinn Fein into the talks if I can. We have had two meetings with them at official level to clarify our position on various issues of concern to them, and to set out our own. I now want officials to send them a short piece of paper by the end of this week, so that they can be in no doubt of where we stand. I attach a copy of what we propose to send. I would be grateful if you could treat this in strict confidence for the moment. We may want to arrange a further meeting of officials with Sinn Fein early next week, but that itself is seriously threatened by continuing IRA violence.

In any case I plan to make a statement about our position, probably next week. This would explain again our position on confidence-building, decommissioning, and the time-frame for the negotiations. It would also set out that we have in mind a period of some 6 weeks to assess a ceasefire. In other

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words a ceasefire in mid-June would lead, if it were satisfactory in word and deed, to Sinn Fein's formal entry into the talks by the end of July.

I should add that I propose to ensure that the substantive political talks get under way in September, whether Sinn Fein are in the talks or not. I am not prepared to allow further delay. So Sinn Fein need to make up their minds whether they want to be part of the political process or not.

I hope you will be ready to support fully this approach and that we can also reach agreement rapidly on decommissioning, to enable the talks to move forward. I am prepared to make a reasonable offer to Sinn Fein, despite the risks this entails. I hope they will not misunderstand the position or my determination. I will not tolerate an approach from them which claims to be political but remains underpinned by violence or the threat of it. Their current twin-track strategy leaves me genuinely alarmed about their sincerity.

I want to make rapid progress this summer and will do everything I can to achieve this. I know I can count on your influence to help me do so. If the two Governments are together, we are best placed to move others.

I assume you will also want to show this to Bertie Ahern.

Yours ever
Tony

Mr John Bruton TD

AIDE MEMOIRE**MEETINGS WITH SINN FEIN**

The purpose of the meetings on 21 and 28 May was to ensure there was no misunderstanding of the Government's position or of Sinn Fein's. This note sets out the Government's position, in particular on the points raised by Sinn Fein.

First, Sinn Fein's participation in talks. The entry of Sinn Fein into the talks requires an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. Negotiating while violence continues, or under the threat of violence, is unacceptable.

The British Government wants to see the talks proceed on an inclusive basis, and move on to the substantive political issues as soon as possible, and in any case by September. It wants to see Sinn Fein participating in these talks. Sinn Fein's entry is governed by the legal requirements set out in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the "Ground Rules for All-Party Negotiations". The Secretary of State is legally obliged to issue an invitation to Sinn Fein when she considers those requirements are met, having made a political judgement of all the circumstances in the round.

Some time will be needed to assess a ceasefire to see that words and deeds are matching before such a judgement can be made. We understand that an open-ended time period gives rise to accusations of bad faith. We are prepared therefore to remove any misunderstanding by saying the period of time for such a judgement is some 6 weeks. If an unequivocal ceasefire is in place by mid-June, and is satisfactory in word and deed, Sinn Fein would be invited to a plenary session of the negotiations by the end of July. That would be the occasion for Sinn Fein to make clear its commitment to the Mitchell 6 principles.

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In the period immediately following a ceasefire, we expect participants might wish to consider adjourning the talks. As was said by the previous Government and this Government, Ministerial meetings with Sinn Fein would be possible, as well as bilateral and other meetings in Castle Buildings, including between the Independent Chairmen and Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein would also have access to an office in Castle Buildings.

Second, timeframe. Because of its concern to get this process moving, the Government believes the talks should not continue beyond May 1998, the date envisaged by current legislation, and that a settlement should be achieved by then. There will be regular reviews of progress.

Third, de-commissioning. The talks participants are currently addressing the issue of decommissioning. The Government has always made it clear that it supports parallel decommissioning as recommended by Mitchell, and that it wants to resolve this rapidly to the satisfaction of the participants so that it does not block the start of substantive political negotiations in September. It is working with the Irish Government to do so. This can only be on the basis of implementing all aspects of the Mitchell report. As mutual progress is made on political issues and decommissioning, this can create growing mutual trust and confidence on all sides.

Any agreement on decommissioning seems likely to include a commitment by each participant to work constructively and in good faith to implement all aspects of the Mitchell report; an independent commission, to be established in parallel with the launch of substantive political negotiations; a dedicated committee of the plenary to advance all aspects of the Mitchell report; and a review mechanism for progress across the spectrum of the negotiations.

Fourth, confidence-building. The Government wants to build confidence on all sides of the community, based on principles of equality of opportunity, equity of treatment and parity of esteem. Measures already announced include the incorporation of the ECHR into domestic law; a review of training opportunities for young people; a commitment to equality of opportunity in the labour market; a commitment to legislate this year on the North Report; and a commitment to implement proposals to develop a policing service capable of securing the support of the whole community, including a more independent complaints system.

Confidence-building is of course a two way street. A genuine and lasting abandonment of violence would do more to rebuild confidence across the community than any other step. Other paramilitary activity such as intimidation through so-called punishment attacks should also stop, on all sides. This would help the Government to respond imaginatively in areas such as security force deployments.

Sinn Fein's concerns were set out in its paper of 10 October. This note answers these concerns fully. An immediate and unequivocal IRA ceasefire is now needed to enable Sinn Fein to enter the talks as set out above. If Sinn Fein do not enter the talks, the substantive negotiations will be taken forward in September in any event.

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