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Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

10 June, 1998.

The Right Honourable Tony Blair, M.P.,
Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London.

Dear Tony,

I am writing to express my serious concern at the decisions taken on the Policing Commission and the Prisons Bill and in particular at the manner in which those decisions were taken.

Coupled with the leak of the Secretary of State's conversations about the Policing Commission they have created a real sense of alarm amongst Nationalists that some people in the system are attempting to claw back parts of the Good Friday Agreement with which they do not agree.

At this stage my principal concern is not to go over the past but to ensure that future decisions concerning the Agreement are reached after open discussion between us which reach a clear and agreed understanding of what each side will do. We can draw lessons from the Police Commission which caused unnecessary problems between us, damaged confidence in the balanced implementation of the Agreement and inflicted unnecessary discomfort on those who were willing to accept membership. All this could have been avoided had we sat down at an early stage, discussed possible names and reached agreement on the membership.

Likewise an early discussion of the Prisons Bill would have allowed me to put at that stage my strong view that the approach adopted in the Bill, of redefining what constitutes a ceasefire and of seeking to specify terrorist organisations may be storing up real problems.

Oifig an Taoisigh, Tithe an Rialtais, Baile Átha Cliath 2.
Office of the Taoiseach, Government Buildings, Dublin 2.



Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

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I understand that your system is considering a number of early announcements post the 25 June Assembly Election. It is clear also that the parades issue and the formation of the Shadow Executive in Northern Ireland will be contentious. I would ask that you and the Secretary of State send a clear message to all relevant parts of your system, as I and David Andrews will be happy to do in our case, that any such decisions follow on open consultation between our systems. This message should make clear that adequate time be allowed for realistic consideration and decision at the political level between the two of us if that is required.

I trust you will appreciate my concern that we act in every way together to maximise the positive and minimise the contentious in the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and that we preserve the Agreement's essential balance. I know from your work in reaching the Agreement that that is very much your personal approach and wish. I believe that we both, with David Andrews and Mo Mowlam, need to make absolutely clear to our respective systems that we will not be diverted from that purpose.

Yours sincerely,

Bertie Ahern, T.D.,
Taoiseach