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1/3

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To: HQ
For: David Cooney

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

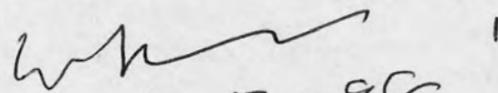
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Subj: Northern Ireland Bill

I attach a draft press release, with attachment, for issue by the Secretary of State in connection with the above.

Tavis, each

We are going through the Bill, as are D/FA. There are some problems with it but we will complete our assessment tomorrow.


16.7.98

2/3

DRAFT PRESS RELEASE FOR INTRODUCTION**SECRETARY OF STATE INTRODUCES BILL TO IMPLEMENT AGREEMENT**

The Secretary of State, Dr Marjorie Mowlam, MP, today introduced in the House of Commons the Northern Ireland Bill, which carries into law the key provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. Dr Mowlam said:

The Bill is one of the most important of the present Parliament. In giving legal form to the Agreement that was negotiated with such courage and vision by the representatives of the people of Northern Ireland on Good Friday, it opens the way for Northern Ireland to advance to the happier, more harmonious, stable and tolerant future the great majority of its people have voted for.

We have drafted the Bill to give effect faithfully to the whole of the Agreement, so far as legislation is needed, adding to the machinery only where necessary to make it work.

We have prepared this Bill in a fraction of the time usually taken. We are determined to have everything in place so that the Agreement to come into operation as soon as the parties are ready. Our timetable means we can have a fully operational Assembly, with the north-south bodies up and running as well, very early in the New Year.

The pace of drafting has meant that we have had far less opportunity to consult the parties than we would have wished. But we have made some changes in response to suggestions from them. In other areas, we acknowledge the force of points that have been made to us, and we will be ready to bring forward amendments to the Bill. And we will be ready to listen to further points about the way the Bill reflects the Agreement, if necessary bringing forward our own amendments to the Bill after the summer.

3/3

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Bill was introduced in the House of Commons today. It is available from the Stationery Office, ISBN.....

The Bill is intended to go through all its Commons stage before the summer, moving to the House of Lords as soon as it returns in the Autumn, and becoming law before the end of the year.

The Bill covers:

- the key constitutional principle of consent, in clauses that were included in the Agreement;
- the legislative powers of the new Northern Ireland Assembly;
- the selection of Ministers, the ways in which they function and account to the Assembly, and their removal or exclusion from office;
- the setting up and operation of the north-south bodies;
- reforms of human rights; and
- the key features of the equality White Paper, as modified in the light of public discussion.

The Government acknowledges that a number of clauses in the Bill will need amendment, including those on removal and exclusion from office.

A number of technical clauses in the Bill reflect the Scottish and Welsh devolution legislation, now in the final stages of its passage through Parliament. The Bill will repeal the Government of Ireland Act 1920; all but a few provisions of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973; the arrangements for Direct Rule, which will disappear for good as soon as the Assembly takes power; and the Northern Ireland (Elections) Bill passed earlier this year to pave the way for elections to the Assembly and its shadow existence.