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LETTER FROM W K LINDSAY, PS/SECRETARY OF STATE TO JOHN HOLMES, PS/PRIME MINISTER DATED 10 DECEMBER 1997 RE PM'S MEETING WITH SINN FEIN, 11 DECEMBER

CC: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L)

PS/MR MURPHY (L & B) *

PS/MR INGRAM (L & B) *

PS/MR PILLING *

PS/MR SEMPLE *

MR THOMAS *

MR STEELE

MR BELL

MR DANIELL

MR LEACH

MR STEPHENS *

MR WATKINS

MR BEETON

MR BROOKER

MRS COLLINS

MR FERGUSON

MR HILL

MR MACCABE

MR PERRY

MR WHITE

MR WOODS

MS JUDE

MS MAPSTONE

MR WHYSALL

Journal
Tas Lt - ? monitored by
Joe - it scarcely a
word of public sys. purity!!
1. Mr. [unclear] 18.12
2. Mr. [unclear] 10.12
LD 19/12

John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

10 December 1997

[Dear John,]

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH SINN FÉIN - 11 DECEMBER

The Prime Minister is due to meet a Sinn Féin delegation on 11 December. I understand that the delegation will comprise Gerry Adams MP, Martin McGuinness MP, Lucilita Bhreatnach, Martin Ferris, Siobhan O'Hanlon, Michelle Gildernew and Richard McAuley. My Secretary of State, Paul Murphy and Quentin Thomas will attend in support of the Prime Minister.

Key Messages

The Prime Minister will want to test Sinn Féin's commitment to peace. But Sinn Féin will also be wanting to establish whether the Prime Minister is committed to genuine negotiations and a process of radical change in Northern Ireland.

The key messages the Prime Minister should aim to convey are:

- * **peace and politics are the only way forward.**
- * **we are committed to radical change in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere.**
The status quo is not an option.
- * **we are committed to genuine negotiations, will continue to press Trimble;**

* **want to help you if you are committed to peace.**

Sinn Féin's Agenda

In recent days, Sinn Féin have expressed extreme anxiety about reaching any preliminary agreement before Christmas which appears to endorse partition. Although McGuinness recently said in public that there would not be a united Ireland in May, they (like other parties) are worried about extremist criticism over Christmas.

The meeting takes place amidst concerns that the IRA may be planning a return to violence. Assuming that the leadership are still committed to the political negotiations - and they continue to give every indication that they are - Adams and McGuinness will therefore be looking for as much reassurance as possible from the Prime Minister.

On confidence building measures, there is some evidence from other reporting that these are now beginning to have a positive impact on republican thinking. Perversely, Mr Trimble's recent criticisms of HMG for making too many concessions to nationalists may help to convince the republican movement that HMG is serious. The Prime Minister can remind Sinn Féin of the measures that have been taken to date and emphasise our commitment to look for further measures as the situation allows.

A speaking note is at **Tab A**.

Sinn Féin will obviously want to use the meeting both as a publicity opportunity and as a forum to raise (again) a number of grievances. The most likely to come up are prisoner issues (including extraditions and the case of Roisin McAliskey), demilitarisation (on which we have a good story to tell), Bloody Sunday and Irish language. Briefing and lines to take on these and on other possible issues are attached at **Tabs B to J**. We have included some detailed briefing on prisoner issues and will leave it to you to decide how much to show to the Prime Minister.

Handling Issues

David Trimble suggested in a recent call that the Prime Minister should speak to the media after the meeting, in order to counter-balance the level of publicity given to Sinn Féin. An alternative would be to issue a short press release; I attach an outline draft (**Tab K**).

[Yours ever,]

[Ken]

W K LINDSAY

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**PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH SINN FÉIN
LINES TO TAKE & BRIEFING NOTES**

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TAB A

SPEAKING NOTE

- * Welcome Sinn Féin's continuing involvement in the talks.
- * Am dealing with Sinn Féin in **good faith**.
- * **Want to help you if you are committed to peace.**
- * **Peace and politics are the only way forward.**
- * We are **committed to radical reform** in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere. The status quo is not an option..
- * We are **committed to genuine negotiations**. We want the widest possible consensus, including Sinn Féin.
- * Hope we now see signs of **greater engagement in talks**, and the outline of an agreement becoming clearer.
- * Understand your frustration at **UUP's non-engagement**: will continue to press Trimble.
- * However, believe your focus on the need for direct engagement with the UUP may be a mistake - by elevating a symbolic issue into a totem you have played into the hands of the UUP. It would be better to build on the substantive point that both parties are contributing fully to the negotiations; and as the talks move deeper into substance the likelihood of direct engagement will increase anyway.

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- * Recognise the **importance of building confidence** within all sections of the community.

- * However, confidence building is a **two-way street**: Sinn Féin, like all the other parties, must do their bit to enhance confidence and trust both within and outwith the negotiations.

- * Have to reiterate: we are **treating you in all respects as a constitutional political party**. We **cannot however be indulgent of any conduct by the IRA that amounts to a violation of the ceasefire**.

- * Happy to discuss the key areas in which an agreement will be found. All elements are of course essential to the whole, but can we go through one by one?
 - * Provisions **safeguarding rights** and **addressing equality and justice issues**.

 - * **A constitutional understanding**: we are committed to the principle of consent in all its aspects, reflected in legislation.

 - * **A local institution**: all parties, except so far you, favour an Assembly of some kind in Northern Ireland, with executive and legislative powers at least in respect of economic and social matters.

 - * **A framework for co-operation in these two islands** governing the totality of relationships, including Northern Ireland;

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- * A **framework for North/South co-operation**: bringing together those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the South.

- * Standing **intergovernmental machinery between the British and Irish governments**.

SECURITY & PRISONERS - KEY POINTS TO MAKE

- * I am pleased that we have been able to take advantage of the reduced level of terrorist activity following the reinstatement of the IRA ceasefire in July, which is why we have greatly **reduced security** throughout NI.
- * Significant moves have been taken to reduce the impact of security measures on everyday life. There is now no routine daytime patrolling by the Army in support of RUC foot patrols in Belfast, Londonderry and elsewhere. Army patrols throughout Northern Ireland in support of the RUC are at half the level they were before the IRA ceasefire, 250 soldiers have returned to their base in England and helicopter activity has reduced by around one quarter.
- * Although some groups (such as CAC and LVF) have not declared cease-fires and continue to pose a threat and there are daily incidents of shootings, beatings, petrol bombings, bomb scares etc, many steps have been taken to return NI to normality. We will continue to respond swiftly and positively when the security situation allows.
- * Aware of the importance which you attach to the sensitive issue of **prisoners**.
- * Have already done a lot on this with early releases, repatriations & transfers, Christmas home leave, reduction of security classification etc
- * Dr Mowlam has clearly said that further movement on prisons matters including prisoner releases is not excluded. In particular, the construction of a peaceful and lasting settlement would provide opportunities to make progress in this and other areas.
- * Any changes to release arrangements must be justified and must not undermine community confidence in the criminal justice system or the political process

Defensive lines on Observation Posts in South Armagh

- * Threat in area remains high. Chief Constable must make judgements based on information available to him.

- * Stage has not yet been reached when complete normalisation is possible - a number of installations in South Armagh must remain for time being, until threat reduces and disappears - look forward to day when this is possible. All have a role in achieving this.

BLOODY SUNDAY

- * The Government recognises that the events of 30 January 1972 in Londonderry still arouse great pain and sorrow. The Government has indicated a clear desire to address this issue. We deeply regret the loss of life.

- * Officials are examining the evidence presented to the previous Secretary of State by some of the relatives of those killed and that presented by the Irish Government. If there is new evidence the appropriate action will be taken.

- * No options have been ruled out but the material must be examined thoroughly first.

- * Mo Mowlam met the relatives of some of those killed at a lunch on 3 July , she told the families that she would examine the material make a statement as soon as possible, but that might take several months.

- * **[If pressed]** We do plan to inform the Irish Government and the relatives of our decision before we make an announcement.

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TAB D

IRISH LANGUAGE

- * Government recognises importance of the Irish language for many people in Northern Ireland as part of their cultural heritage

- * understand and welcome the fact that you will be meeting Tony Worthington next week (18 December) to discuss a set of proposals on education through the medium of Irish which was presented to Mo Mowlam a number of weeks ago

- * Government supporting efforts to create film production industry in Northern Ireland using EU and Lottery funds, for which Irish language film/programme makers can apply

- * UK and Irish officials are working with the broadcasters towards agreeing an implementation plan to extend the RTE signal within Northern Ireland. Along with RTE 1 and RTE 2 Teilifis na Gælige(the Irish Language Broadcasting channel) will also benefit from increased penetration of RTE in Northern Ireland.

- * **[if raised]** Government considering the implications of signing the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, which could enhance the status of Irish in Northern Ireland.

POLICE REFORM/DISBANDMENT & COMMUNITY JUSTICE

- * There is work to be done to make the RUC more efficient, more effective, more accountable, and more acceptable especially in the Nationalist community. The Police (Northern Ireland) Bill currently in Parliament is an important step in achieving these aims.

- * Disbanding the RUC is not on the Government's agenda.

Community Justice

If raised: express interest, but without any commitment.

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TAB F

BRIAN NELSON

- * Nelson was arrested and charged with serious crimes and was sentenced accordingly.
- * Nelson has served his sentence and has been released on parole.

Request for Independent Inquiry

- * Matter was fully investigated at the time - not convinced a further investigation would add anything.

Background Note

1. The decision to arrest Nelson (in 1990) was taken by Mr John Stevens (the Deputy Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire) and his enquiry team. Mr Stevens was conducting a rigorous investigation into allegations of collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and members of the security forces, at the request of the RUC Chief Constable. Nelson was charged and convicted of a number of very serious crimes (including five counts of conspiracy to murder). It would have been quite wrong to have turned a blind eye to illegality, whatever the cost to the intelligence system. There can be no blanket immunity from prosecution for informants who commit crimes.

2. The trial judge in the Nelson case recognised that there is a difficult dividing line between lawful participation within a terrorist organisation as a security force informer, and active engagement in terrorism. In the judge's view, Nelson crossed over that line.