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BRITISH EMBASSY

DUBLIN

27 October 1972

Mr. H. J. O'Dowd,
Department of the Taoiseach,
Dublin.

Dear Mr. O'Dowd,

I enclose the message from the Prime Minister to the Taoiseach, about which I spoke to you last evening.

11pm

Yours sincerely,

David Blatherwick

D. E. S. Blatherwick

Encs (2)

Isaftear
Mr. Macfie 27.10.72
Ruairí Ó Cinnéide
Josephine
I have sent a copy with M.F.D. Affairs
on the Taoiseach's instructions.

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27.10.72

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ENCLOSURE 2

TEXT OF ANNOUNCEMENT CONCERNING THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL ELECTIONS

The Secretary of State has today decided to postpone the Northern Ireland local government elections until the spring. The new date will be determined in consultation with the political parties. The decision to postpone the local elections will require an order of the Westminster Parliament.

The date of 6th December for the local elections was carefully chosen because it was the last convenient date if the new local authorities were to function properly from the date set in the original scheme of 1st April 1973.

However, the Secretary of State has received very strong representations from political parties and many other responsible organisations that 6th December would be a very unsatisfactory date for polling. Postponement on the other hand would enable the local elections to be held at a more normal and convenient time of the year: on a more up-to-date electoral register, which is a considerable advantage: and after the border plebiscite, so that the local elections could more easily focus on truly local issues.

Postponement of the local elections involves deferring the introduction of the reformed local government system, of which the new District Councils and the Agencies for Education, Health and Personal Social Services, Roads, Planning and other major regional services are integral parts. The effective date for the reorganisation will therefore be moved back from 1st April to 1st October 1973. Preparations will go ahead for the new scheme to start then.

The existing authorities will be asked to carry on for a further period of six months. The Secretary of State is confident that he can rely on their help and co-operation in maintaining services at their present high level. He will be consulting them and will afford them every possible assistance in doing so.

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ENCLOSURE 1

MESSAGE DATED 26 OCTOBER 1972 FROM THE PRIME MINISTER
TO THE TAOISEACH

When we talked in Paris during the Summit Conference I gave you an account of the likely programme for future developments in Northern Ireland. I should therefore like to let you know personally that we have decided to postpone for six months the local government elections originally arranged for 6 December. The announcement of the postponement will be made by the Northern Ireland Office at 10.30 a.m. tomorrow Friday, and I have asked that the text should be passed to you, together with this message.

The announcement sets out fully the reasons for our decision and there is little I need add. Mr. Whitelaw discussed the broader background to our thinking with Dr. O'Sullivan this afternoon, and he will no doubt be letting you have a full account.

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