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cc: Tawneach
Tavanis
Liam
Liam for Tawneach
Liam Kelly
An Uachtar

Attorney
General
Secretary
A-1.

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TO HQ FROM BELFAST

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FOR O TUATHAIL FROM RYAN

AT A MEETING OF THE SECRETARIAT TO-DAY ELLIOTT OF THE BRITISH SIDE SAID THAT THERE HAD BEEN FURTHER DISCUSSION ON HIS SIDE OF THE VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE. FOLLOWING CONSULTATION WITH THE CHIEF CONSTABLE THEIR VIEW WAS THAT, FROM A SECURITY VIEWPOINT, IT WAS "INCONCEIVABLE" THAT A MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE COULD BE HELD IN STORMONT AT ANY TIME DURING THE RUN UP TO THE ELECTIONS. THE ALTERNATIVE VENUE (I.E. ALDERGROVE) WAS ONLY marginally MORE ACCEPTABLE AND THEY WERE NOW FIRMLY OF THE VIEW THAT LONDON WAS THE ONLY VENUE IF IT WAS CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL TO HAVE A MEETING THIS MONTH. THEY ARE ANXIOUS TO AVOID THE DIFFICULTIES THAT OCCURRED PREVIOUSLY ABOUT LAST MINUTE DECISIONS ON VENUE AND WANT TO FINALISE THE MATTER THIS WEEK. THEY HAVE SUGGESTED THAT, IF AGREEMENT CANNOT BE REACHED IN THE SECRETARIAT, DONLON AND ANDREW MIGHT DISCUSS THE MATTER. KING WILL BE AWAY FROM FRIDAY NEXT UNTIL 6 JANUARY AND WILL CONSEQUENTLY NOT BE IN A POSITION TO "NEGOTIATE" IN THE MATTER.

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