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KSM.
PSS
Mr Nally
Aunt Small
Aunt Brooke
Councillor A1

SECURE FAX NO. 261

TO:	HQ	FROM:	BELFAST
FOR:	A/Sec O hUiginn	FROM:	Joint Secretary
DATE:	2 March, 1992	PAGES:	3

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Meeting between Mr. Brooke and the Party Leaders

1. We have already said you see the statement issued following this morning's meeting. The British Joint Secretary, Robert Alston, gave me the following briefing this afternoon.

2. An hour was given over to political talks and a second hour to the economic situation which was the original purpose of the meeting as envisaged under the 27 January arrangements. Alston had no detail on the second subject. He described the session as workmanlike, serious with no point-scoring. There was a similar atmosphere in the political discussion among three of the party leaders. The odd man out was Alderdice with whom the others did not have a good relationship.

3. The party leaders clearly wanted to get on with the talks but had not thought of the detail. There will be a plenary meeting next Monday morning assuming that the assurances (referred to in today's statement) from the Prime Minister and Mr. Kinnock are forthcoming. The plenary is expected to remit arrangements for the talks to a version of the business committee which met last summer. That committee is expected to meet in turn for a couple of days at which point the Prime Minister is being relied upon to call an election. If the Prime Minister prefers to delay to May or June, there will be pressure on the party leaders to get on with substantive talks. It seems, however, that they have given no thought to this possibility.

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4. Once a General Election is called, the talks process will stop until after the election. The basis of agreement, therefore, is the same as that of 18 December except that there is not expected to be any period of substantive talks before the election and, most importantly, that the Unionists have withdrawn their insistence on a fresh look if there is a change of administration. This is the point on which all the problems arose last December and it will probably be wise not to delve into it but rather to concentrate on the fact that the Unionists are prepared to be satisfied with the assurances given by Messrs. Major and Brooke.

7. Kenneth

5. It was intended last December that the Conference would meet during the election period in order to ensure against any impression that it was in some kind of limbo. That was in the situation of several weeks substantive talks before an election. In the circumstances now envisaged, a Conference after that on 6 March would seem unnecessary.

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6. Immediately after the election there is expected to be contact between the two Governments and also between the parties and the new Government. A Conference would then be arranged to relaunch the gap for the purpose of political talks. It is assumed that such a Conference would take place in mid to late April and that talks would run until end June. This is about the same period as envisaged last summer. The question of lengthening this gap might arise but, apart from any doubt on our side of the implications of this for the Conference if things did not go well, there might be a concern on the part of the British Government and the Unionists, as there was last year, about bringing the talks close to 12 July.

- 7. I re-established with Alston that the ground rules will be the same as for last summer. There will be no question about the ability of the Conference to meet during the election period or the ability of the Secretariat to service its meetings. I also re-established that the work of the Secretariat will continue through the talks period, in any event, in view of the permanent nature of the Conference business. In regard to the last point, I do not think the British can be relied upon and I believe it will be necessary to get detailed assurances from them in the Conference or otherwise before any serious gap begins.

- 8. In summary, the Conference of 6 March will launch the gap, parties will meet in plenary on the morning of 9 March, a business committee will meet for a couple of days at which point it is expected that the General Election will be called and the talks will be suspended until after the election. The Conference will then take place as soon as possible which will re-launch the gap for the purpose of political talks.

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FOR Mr. D. Nally

DATE: 2/3 TOTAL NO. OF PAGES 2 (incl. this one)

FROM : _____

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MESSAGE

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M. Keenan
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*to A. J. McGuire
Counselor AT
re Call
Mr. Jones
H. J. Jones, Liffis*

NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

2 March 1992

MEETING WITH PARTY LEADERS

The Secretary of State and the Minister of State met the four party leaders this morning to discuss the holding of substantive political talks. The Secretary of State on behalf of the Government welcomed the statement the party leaders had issued on Friday. In a positive discussion, it was agreed that, with the assurances which it was expected the Prime Minister and Mr Kinnock would give, it would be possible and valuable to begin such talks as soon as possible. The Secretary of State confirmed that he would wish to discuss this with the Irish Government at the meeting of the Inter-Governmental Conference this week in the expectation that substantive talks would begin very soon. Today's meeting moved on to discuss the economy, as had been planned when the meeting had been set up.