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MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENTS ROBINSON AND CLINTON

WHITE HOUSE, 14 MAY 1993.

*Taoiseach
Pl. see in article
Par 8 (Tax referral)
Date: 17/5/93*

INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting which lasted for over half an hour was warm, open and constructive. There was a photo-call prior to the start of the talks in the course of which a number of questions were asked of both Presidents on an on-the-record basis. President Robinson was asked if she supported the Peace Envoy concept. In reply she referred to the meeting which President Clinton had with the Taoiseach on the 17th of March. She said she wished to avail of the occasion to convey thanks to President Clinton for his concern for Ireland. She was aware that he had said he was a friend of Ireland, not just on St Patrick's Day, and that was very much appreciated in Ireland. She also welcomed his constructive approach to Irish affairs.

VISIT TO IRELAND

2. Replying to a question as to whether he would visit Ireland President Clinton said that he would like to do so. In response to a further question as to whether he had enjoyed his first 100 days in office, he said he found the experience exhilarating. Conor O'Clery asked about the refusal of a visa to Gerry Adams to visit the U.S. President Clinton said that prior to his election he had said he would ask the State Department to review the case. He had found that there were no grounds to over-rule the State Department's decision.

PRESIDENT CLINTON'S INTEREST IN IRELAND

3. President Robinson was asked if she had any message for President Clinton. She said that she would wish to reiterate the invitation already extended to come to Ireland. She wished to express appreciation of the President's attention to Irish affairs and concern for Ireland - the modern Ireland which she represented.

4. After the press had left President Robinson again acknowledged President Clinton's constructive interest in Ireland. She conveyed appreciation for the inclusion in the US budget of a contribution towards the International Fund for Ireland. That Fund financed projects which encouraged cross-border contacts. It had a constructive impact in a variety of practical ways.

5. Ireland was not a greying European country. We had a young population, in very many instances educated beyond the capacity of the country to absorb. For this reason US investment was important for Ireland: also it gave a very good return. US companies who invested in Ireland were part of a process of shaping Ireland in its modern format (there was a balanced relationship between the US and Ireland in this regard). The President expressed the hope that there would be "no hiccups" in this connection. These firms enabled young Irish people to remain in their own country and find work there.

6. Irish society was changing - becoming more pluralist. We had a close affinity with the United States and "admire the way you are addressing problems of the global village of the world". At the same time the US was adapting to realities "as you find them". President Robinson referred to her attendance at the Council of

Europe Conference on Human Rights in Strasbourg early this year. She found there a real appreciation of "changes of approach" in the signals that have come from the US. "The seeds you are sowing are bearing fruit" she said.

HUMAN RIGHTS

7. President Clinton conveyed his appreciation to President Robinson for her remarks. In relation to human rights, he referred to China where the US are buying 30% of that country's exports. It was US policy to have regard to human rights in this regard. They were trying to push the ball forward in the human rights area. Sometimes their efforts resulted in "no good deed going unpunished".

TAX DEFERRAL ISSUE

8. President Clinton said that the young Irish in the US had made a real contribution to "our society". On the tax deferral issue, he said that the US tax proposals would not have a measurable change in Ireland's case. He acknowledged that US companies who invested in Ireland were putting money into the country and creating jobs in Ireland. Again, on tax changes, he said "I doubt that it will have any significant impact on investment in Ireland". Turning to the Peace Envoy question the President said that he took the view that he should not act independent of what the Irish Government would wish the US to do. He expressed his support for the resumption of the talks and spoke of the Northern Ireland situation as a "family fight".

NORTHERN IRELAND

9. President Robinson referred to Ireland's participation in the EC as a relevant consideration in regard to Northern Ireland.

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There was considerable mobility in Ireland and lots of groups from Northern Ireland were coming to visit Aras an Uachtarain. She was keen that such groups should have contact with similar groups in the South (and with each other) on a getting to know each other basis. Referring to President Clinton she said that his continuing interest in the Northern Ireland situation had been very useful. It had helped to concentrate minds - turning on the heat as the President had said. She was hopeful that after the local elections the talks process would resume. The will was there on the different sides that these talks should take place again. There was a lot of pressure on local politicians on the ground. President Robinson spoke of the link between the jobs situation and Northern Ireland situation which she said was now being realised much more than previously. There would be a huge quantum leap forward if we had a settlement and consequently there was pressure on politicians of all parties. Referring again to President Clinton she said that his interest had been most helpful.

10. President Clinton in response said that if a solution to the Northern Ireland situation could be found, this would lead to resolving other situations in the world.

SOMALIA AND SUDAN

11. The conversation then turned to Somalia. The President referred to the hard work done by many Irish volunteers on the ground. The Tánaiste mentioned the recent Government decision to send a Supply and Transport contingent to Somalia which would assist in this regard. President Robinson referred to the significant US intervention on the ground in Somalia. There was an extraordinary difference in the position now. In Ireland there was a growing identification with the problems of developing

countries. Irish people were working in Sudan also. The situation there needed an appropriate level of response - a way of showing that the world can be constructive.

12. Vice President Gore said that one tended to shy away from a Somalia type solution in this instance. He asked President Robinson what she would recommend.

BOSNIA

13. In response President Robinson said that a very significant and immediate increase in human relief was necessary. It was also essential to ensure that that relief would get through. She added that it was understandable that the US was preoccupied with Bosnia. There was no easy solution to the overall problem there. At the same time there was not a chasm between Europe and the US in their respective approaches. The Tánaiste reaffirmed his view that the problem did not have an easy solution. He emphasised that it was very important that "we work it out together".

14. President Clinton also spoke of finding ways of working together in this context. He was critical of the press in asking "macho" questions. The Tánaiste agreed and added "we are not going to be dictated to by the press". He spoke of the discussion on Bosnia at the European Foreign Ministers meeting on Monday last. President Clinton said that he was spending an enormous amount of time on this issue.

15. President Robinson added that a significant number of Irish aid workers were operating in Bosnia. In response to a question from President Clinton the Tánaiste said that he was receiving

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feedback from the Irish personnel on the ground which consisted of differing views. He expressed the view that the sanctions had started to hurt and referred to changes in the attitudes of the Serbian leadership. President Clinton mentioned the recent UN resolution. President Robinson spoke of the complexity and intractable nature of the Bosnian situation which was now better recognised. Vice President Gore thought it was the toughest in this century. The Tánaiste said that the UN were now coming under pressure and needed more support. President Clinton, in agreeing with this analysis, stated "I do too". He said that the US had ideological disputes with the UN in the past but they were not cutting UN contributions now. He recognised that the UN had kept a lot of people alive in Bosnia. Vice President Gore added "last winter in particular".

16. Referring to a question from President Clinton on the current negotiations, the Tánaiste said that he had no regard for the referendum in Bosnia - "nobody has any time for that". He envisaged further consultations after the referendum was concluded and added that in his view the current embargo was working, especially the financial aspects.

17. President Clinton referred to the militants on the ground and wondered how many shells etc were secretly stacked away. President Robinson acknowledged that this was a real concern.

CONCLUSION

18. In concluding the meeting, President Robinson expressed her great pleasure at the opportunity of meeting President Clinton. This had been the first occasion that a President from Ireland had visited the White House since the early 1960's. There were very

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close connections between Ireland and the United States. She conveyed her appreciation to President Clinton for his interest and constructive approach which was much appreciated in Ireland. President Clinton, in response, said "if there is more we can do, return to us".

The meeting then concluded.

Fm

F Murray

14 May 1993

NOTE:

Before the start of the meeting and the introduction of the press, Mrs Hillary Clinton came into the Oval Office and spoke briefly with the President, Mr Robinson and the Tánaiste. This had not been expected but was warmly appreciated.