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## PRESS RELEASE

FROM GERRY ADAMS

DATE 23 November 1993

Over the past weeks many of you have asked Sinn Fein to provide proof of the contact between us and representatives of the British Government. Up to now we have declined to do so in an attempt to protect a line of communication which has always been dependant on confidentiality and which, we had hoped, could assist in the search for a viable peace process.

At all times republicans have endeavoured to avoid the disclosure of this line of communication, even when such revelations would have been to our advantage or to the disadvantage of the British Government. Despite the fact that the British Government, have shown no real evidence that they are genuinely seeking a real settlement, we regard the contact as a potentially important element in the development of an effective peace process. For this reason we endeavoured at all times to protect this contact believing that the objective of peace was far more important than the short term political effects of disclosure.

At all times, however, we made it clear to the British Government that, if the contacts did become public, we would not tell lies by denying their existence. The onus was on both sides to ensure total confidentiality. For some time now, and going back at least over a three year period, we have been concerned about leaks, whether initiated by elements of the British or the Unionists, and consequent speculation in the press. On each occasion that this happened we formally protested to the British government and expressed our concern.

It is right that there is contact between the British government and our party. It is clearly supported by the majority of British and Irish people. For all of these reasons, Sinn Fein has sought to protect this process. Mr Major and Mr Mayhew, however, have sought to abuse it. They have acted in bad faith and Mayhew's statements are aimed at sowing distension and confusion and distracting attention from the real issues. For this reason, I have called this morning's press conference in order to place before you some of the documents which have been exchanged between our party and the British government. I do this reluctantly and only to correct the lies which are now being told. It is still our intention to maintain and protect the line of contact.

First of all, as I said yesterday, the contact was more than a conduit. It has been in existence over a period of two decades. To our certain knowledge it has never been abused until now by those who politically controlled it on the British side and it has never, ever been abused by the republicans.

The current phase of discussion has been on and off for the last number of years. The latest phase of contact was initiated by the British government. We welcomed it. In the course of this, outlines of British government and Sinn Fein policies were exchanged and discussed. This process was not an alternative to the discussions which I was conducting with John Hume. Indeed on a number of occasions Martin McGuinness instructed his contact that the Hume/Adams discussions were dealing with the substantive issues and that they were a serious effort to reach agreement on the principles, dynamic and the process required to bring peace to Ireland. When John Hume and I reached agreement, the British were informed of this. The IRA's positive attitude to this development was also conveyed to the British. There can be no doubt that Mr Major and his colleagues knew that the Irish peace initiative had the potential to move all of us towards a lasting peace. They have lied about this also.

I now want to deal with some of the detail of our exchanges with the British. This included written position papers. The British government supplied Sinn Fein with its position in a nine paragraph document. We, in turn, supplied them with the Sinn Fein position in an eleven paragraph document. You have them before you.

The British government also proposed that a British government delegation should meet with a Sinn Fein delegation from Sinn Fein for a protected and intense round of discussions. Venues and timescales for these meetings were discussed. We were told that

such an intense period of negotiation would result in Irish republicans being convinced that armed struggle would be no longer necessary. We were asked to seek a short suspension of IRA operations to facilitate these discussions.

Given the importance of all of this, Sinn Fein sought and was given a commitment from the leadership of the Irish Republican Army, that it would suspend operations for two weeks to enable us to explore the potential of the British government's assertion.

This was conveyed to the British government on 10 May 1993.

Although we were informed that the positive response by republicans to the British proposal was the subject of a series of high level meetings by British ministers and officials, there was no positive response by them and although the line was in regular use in this period it was not used in any positive way. In fact, the British moved away from their proposal and refused to follow it through.

We believe this was instanced, in part at least, by party political difficulties which overtook the Tory party leadership at this time, and other difficulties in the House of Commons which lead them to depend on Unionist votes at Westminster.



The bad faith and double dealing involved in this clearly presents serious difficulties for us. It was clear to us from the early summer that the British Government had reneged on its proposal and the previous indications that it may have been actively seeking a way out of conflict. I want to stress also by this time that London was well advised that the discussions between those involved in the Irish peace initiative had reached a point of significant progress. They were also informed by us that this provided the best opportunity and framework for peace if they had the political will to move forward.

Despite all of this the documents we were receiving continued to avoid the main issues. Their content was increasingly disingenuous and it became clear that the British were quite blatantly abusing the line of communication for their own narrow, short term interests. The communications were quite clearly being written with a view to disguise the British government's rejection of the substantial and generous response by the IRA to the British request.

Simultaneously the volume of leaks and rumours increased quite noticeably.

The British Government were now trying to sow confusion and division among republicans. For example, they now claim that the current phase of contact commenced in response to a commitment that the conflict was over.

They were also actively engaged in trying to thwart the Irish peace initiative and to spoil the potential which it presents. For example, they denied knowledge of its contents. Their strategy by this time was based upon lies and disinformation. This remains their strategy up to and including today. Lies, lies and more lies.

There will be more this afternoon.

Patrick Mayhew is going to present a document which he alleges was in response to a communication from us. This is another lie. We did receive such a document but it came on 5 November, out of the blue, and incidentally, nine months after he alleges the contact was initiated. It is also the only substantial policy document we have received since the summer.

This claimed to be a response to a 2 November communication from Sinn Fein. We immediately made it clear that no such communication had been sent by us. You have the British government's 5 November communication before you.

It represents the substance of John Major's public pre-conditions on talks with Sinn Fein as presented in his Lord Mayors Banquet speech. This unsolicited communication from them was a transparent manoeuvre to synchronise their public and private positions in advance of this contact becoming public in a climate of leaks and rumours.

Sinn Fein acted at all times in good faith. We sought to move towards peace, both through this private contact with the British Government and through my talks with the leader of the SDLP John Hume. Republicans have demonstrated flexibility and integrity throughout. The British Government have demonstrated intransigence and duplicity. They have rejected these very real and tangible opportunities for peace.

In conclusion, I return to what is clearly the most important development in twenty five years of conflict - the issue which in reality is at the core of this controversy despite all the efforts at disguising that fact - the Irish peace initiative.

It, I repeat, can deliver peace. John Major has rejected peace. He cannot hide this behind lies, diversions and distractions forever.

He will be held publicly accountable by the people of Ireland, Britain and by international opinion for his denial of peace in Ireland.

There is a need for honesty and a real peace process. Sinn Fein remains committed to this. When the dust has settled on this disgraceful phase of British government duplicity, bad faith and double dealing, all of us will have to endeavour to build such a process. I appeal to people of good will to demonstrate their support for the existing opportunity for peace.