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Talks between PM John Major and SDLP Leader John Hume,  
15 January, 1994

This account is based on a debriefing given by John Hume, to the usual third party, primarily intended for his counterpart in Belfast.

Hume came away with the view that the situation was very high on Major's agenda. Major had thanked him for his detailed statement and very clear interpretation of the Joint Declaration.

Major had said he was unwilling to give clarification, because he was afraid it would develop into negotiation. The link with Sinn Féin was broken not closed.

Hume agreed that there was surely a difference between negotiation and clarification. The Joint Declaration was not a solution. Major's remarks in the House of Commons had caused a lot of trouble.

Major said he had been trying to reassure Unionists, but he accepted his emphasis might be open to misinterpretation. However, something helpful might be said to clarify the situation later this week. In the last point of 5 November message, they had made very clear that exploratory talks were about demilitarisation and participation in dialogue.

John Hume explained self-determination and the Unionist veto were points of difficulty. The veto was a question of fact. It was important to emphasise the British would endorse an agreement reached between the parties.

Major agreed with Hume's explanation of self-determination, and that enormous economic benefits would flow from peace. A great deal could be achieved through exploratory talks. He had never used the word "decontamination". Molyneux had used the world quarantine.

Hume raised the issue of a timetable or a target for agreement in the talks process.

Major said local government reform and an assembly was Molyneux' proposal. The 26 March 1991 statement would continue to be the basis for talks.