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Meeting between Taoiseach and Gerry Adams.
Dublin Airport -- 21 December, 1994

Present were:

Irish side: The Taoiseach, Mr. P. Teahon and the undersigned.

Sinn Fein: Mr. G. Adams, Mr. Jim Gibney, Ms. Rita O' Hare.

1. After initial courtesies and agreement about a fuller meeting early in the New Year, Mr. Adams stressed their absolute commitment to the peace process. The first peaceful Christmas in Northern Ireland for 25 years was the result of great engagement and effort by many people. At some point in the peace process, the momentum would become irreversible. That however needed a proactive engagement by the British Government. All initiatives so far had originated in Ireland. Because of British slowness others had to give the positive signals. The present meeting was another valuable signal. It was important to maintain confidence in the peace process and to move the British to the point where an irreversible dynamic became engaged. Dublin would have to set the example in relation to issues like prisoners, inclusiveness, etc. They had stressed that they could do business with the Taoiseach. The Unionists would not move while the British underwrote their position. He and John Hume had said after the last delegation meeting that the British needed to persuade the people of Ireland to come to agreement. They could not sit on their hands.

2. Mr. Adams then referred to the contacts which Mr. Pat Doherty had with Mr. Teahon on the problem in Portlaoise. There was a deep cultural resistance on the part of the prisoners to sign a form ("a sign out"). He mentioned one prisoner who had signed out on instructions by the IRA, but nevertheless retained the stigma. Prisoners were permitted to sign out for parole, etc. Mr. Adams pointed out that the British released people on licence, and most of the prisoners were due out next year in any case. They had discovered that, whereas current releases were under the 1960 Act, in the 40s and in 1962 releases had been effected under the Offences Against the State Act. (He listed a number of beneficiaries of these provisions, including Tomás MacGiolla). It would be very bad if there was a mix-up on this issue now. It would be seen as reflecting on the new administration.

3. The Taoiseach said that on that issue he wished the Department of Justice to find a creative approach within the law. He stressed that he could not and would not go beyond the law. The 1960 Act was quite specific. He wanted to find a solution. The Taoiseach stressed his total commitment to the peace process. He had been critical of certain aspects in opposition, because that was the job of an opposition. The role of Government was different. He welcomed the regular contact with Sinn Fein at the Forum.

4. The Taoiseach told Mr. Adams that he had taken up the issue of the Mean Scoil with Mr. Major. He understood fully the importance of the Irish language for the dignity and self-esteem of the nationalist community.

5. The Taoiseach said that the arms question was an issue of very considerable importance, but he did not wish it to crowd all other items off the agenda. He felt that he had moved both Major and Blair somewhat in terms of their public

presentation on this issue. At the same time the arms were a threat hanging over the community. They were also a serious obstacle to unionist participation in talks.

6. Mr. Adams noted the Taoiseach's role on the Mean Scoil with great appreciation. He preferred to think in terms of equality of treatment rather than parity of esteem. Gaeilgeoirí saw the British decision as a slap in the face. He was confident the peace process was under no threat from republican arms. He was worried about the impact on the "kids" of actions by the DSMUs. Sinn Fein wanted to see all weapons decommissioned. It was obvious the IRA would not decommission of arms, except as part of a peace settlement. Sinn Fein had been able to persuade the IRA that there was a political alternative to violence. The British were coming into the peace process at their own speed. The permanence debate, clarification issue, etc., had been used to slow things. When "the calenders coincided" these obstacles disappeared, the British Ambassador attended at the Forum, etc. He approved warmly the Taoiseach's comment that it was not a one item agenda. There were 150,000 weapons in Loyalist hands, some of them supplied by the British Government. (He mentioned in parenthesis a rumour that Nelson was out on parole tomorrow. There were less parolees in Northern Ireland this year than last, which people would read as a negative signal). They had very deliberately drawn a distinction between Sinn Fein and the IRA in their contacts with the British. It had required very hard work by Sinn Fein to persuade the IRA to the ceasefire. In this context Mr. Adams listed a number of individuals who had made an important contribution, stressing in particular the value of the Taoiseach giving access to Fr. Alex Reid.
7. The meeting was interrupted by Aer Rianta officials warning that Mr. Adams' flight was to depart. He raised the issue of prisoners in Maghaberry who were being refused Christmas

leave because of a late return from an earlier parole due to a car crash. Mention was made of the contact between Mr. Kelleher of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Mr. Francie Molloy on harassment incidents. Mr. Adams expressed appreciation for that, and particularly contacts which Mr. Kelleher had with residents in the Ormeau Road area.

8. The Taoiseach raised the problem of punishment beatings. Mr. Adams acknowledged the problem, which he said was due to the RUC not being acceptable. "People in high jobs" were not reaching out to the community, who were tempted to take action on their own. The policing issue could be resolved only as part of an overall settlement.

9. Asked by the Taoiseach about the Sinn Fein meetings with the British, Mr. Adams said the first meeting had been good, the second meeting was positive, but the British were saying they would not move until the weapons issue was resolved. He agreed on the value of keeping the Irish Government briefed on developments.

10. After a brief photocall, the meeting then concluded.

Sean O hUiginn
22 December, 1994