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Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

1/6 August, 1995.

**Mr. Gerry Adams,
President,
Sinn Fein.**

Dear Gerry,

Paddy Teahon has briefed me on your discussions with him, and has shown me your recent letter to Sir Patrick Mayhew.

The purpose of this letter is to say that I fully share your concern and determination to preserve and develop the peace. We agree, I think, that in order to secure this objective it is vital that we now find a way to move the process forward in a significant way, and to free up the path towards all-party, inclusive talks. And we agree too that such talks are the only way to arrive at a settlement that will command the widest possible support and to which all parties can ultimately give their consent.

Any settlement designed to last must include the right of the entire nationalist community to have their Irish identity and allegiances fully encompassed in that settlement. The purpose of all-party talks is to achieve this objective in agreement with, and without threatening, the Unionist community, whose identity and allegiances are equally valid.

As you know, at the Summit in Cannes we initiated intensive discussions with the British Government designed to overcome the current set of obstacles to the substantive negotiation we all wish to see. It has been clear for months now that the decommissioning of arms is an obstacle of particular difficulty - especially given the gap between the demand for an

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"instalment" on the one side, and the very clear message that you have given us that it would not be possible to persuade those on the nationalist side in possession of weapons to make any decommissioning gesture.

I have accepted that message, both publicly and privately, and decommissioning has not been allowed to become an obstacle or pre-condition to talks between Sinn Fein and the Irish Government. At the same time, I cannot and will not depart from the view, as head of a sovereign and democratic Government, that arms should only be held within the State by those who have been licensed to hold them by the State.

And I think you will be aware of my view that for as long as the issue of decommissioning is not being addressed, it will remain a major difficulty for many of the parties with whom you wish to negotiate. You yourself acknowledge this implicitly in your letter to Sir Patrick, when you refer to "inclusive negotiations based on democratic principles". These principles rely on peaceful persuasion as the means of changing the viewpoint of others.

Against this background, it has seemed right to me that we should focus as much effort as possible on ways of dealing with the issue of decommissioning of arms, at least to the extent that we can enable all those who are concerned about it to begin the process of negotiation notwithstanding.

The particular proposal that officials have been working on, under the direction of the Tánaiste and myself, is the establishment of an International Commission which would, following consultations with all the parties, make recommendations to the Governments on the modalities of decommissioning in the right circumstances. This Commission would work side by side with a new phase of political talks, to be conducted by the Governments on a "triangular" basis with the parties, and establishing

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from the moment they begin that all the parties would be treated with absolute parity of esteem.

I believe this balanced approach holds the best prospect of getting all-party talks on the substantive issues underway. Indeed, I see the "triangular" talks as representing an initial phase of the all-party talks themselves, and also, as thus achieving the fundamental aim of parity of esteem for all the parties including Sinn Fein.

Your own suggestion is that the next phase should be "kick-started" by a Conference called by both Governments, to include all the parties. I would support this proposal if I believed that there was any likelihood of significant Unionist attendance. Unfortunately, all the evidence available to me suggests the opposite - an immediate and continuing boycott. If that is true, then a Conference intended to kick start the inclusive process could result in setting it back for a long time, for want of adequate preparation and reassurance. That's the reason I favour the slower and more painstaking approach that triangular dialogue will involve. It is likely to build up to a more successful eventual outcome in the end.

I don't want to convey the impression that I have a closed mind on this subject. You may have ideas that would help to provide some level of reassurance to those we need to attract to a Conference.

Indeed, you will no doubt be only too aware that the whole issue of reassurance is one that is likely to bedevil the next few months. I have accepted Sinn Fein's bona fides in regard to the peace process fully, as has my Government and its immediate predecessor. Indeed, I have been more than impressed by the commitment that you and your colleagues have shown to the process through many difficult periods.

But you will know only too well, I'm sure, that there are many others who have yet to accept those bona fides, and who will wish to be constantly

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assured that Sinn Fein is irrevocably committed to democratic and political methods, and to the principle of consent in regard to any lasting outcome. The greatest fear, of course, that many have is that any final settlement that is not acceptable to Sinn Fein will result in an immediate resumption of violence. Public remarks about the continued existence of the IRA run counter to efforts to alleviate that fear.

The reality is that between us we have to continue to seek to find ways of allaying those fears whenever possible. Indeed, I understand that a statement may be in the course of preparation to mark the anniversary of the cease-fire. Such a statement could well be an occasion to allay fear and suspicion further.

I believe the decommissioning of arms can be greatly reduced as a political obstacle, in the mind of the parties now concerned about it, if Sinn Fein and the IRA were to make a clear public statement on the principle of consent. As you know, the two Governments have set out their views on the consent principle in the Downing Street Declaration and the Joint Framework Document. In particular, a statement by Sinn Fein and the IRA, that the total cessation of violence includes a commitment that violence would not be supported as a means of overturning any settlement agreed in all-party talks, and accepted by the people in both North and South respectively, would go a considerable distance towards reassuring many of those now expressing worries on the decommissioning issue. It would improve the political atmosphere, and the prospects for success of the proposed all-party talks.

You have referred from time to time to an understanding with the then Irish Government, prior to the cease-fire. The official record shows that the Government committed themselves to working actively towards a situation of Sinn Fein participation in all-party talks on the basis of total parity and esteem, and with full respect for your electoral mandate. My Government are fully committed to acting on the same basis. It remains

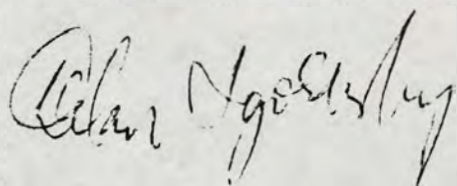
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our paramount objective to ensure that all obstacles to a democratic settlement are overcome. I know that the road has been long but I remain convinced that round-table discussions can and will be achieved.

Finally, may I say that I consider it to be of the greatest importance that we continue to understand each other's point of view and difficulties and that we communicate clearly about any problems arising. Above all else, it is vital that we do not allow misunderstandings to arise which could be harmful to the delicate and complex process in which we are engaged.

Yours sincerely,



Taoiseach.

(Dictated by the Taoiseach and signed in his absence)