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Taoiseach's 4th draft of speaking notes for

Meeting with Mr. Gerry Adams

I have been reading some of your reported comments, and Sinn Féin briefings, in various media over the last week or two. I feel that I have to remind you of certain fundamentals.

In dealing with myself, the Tánaiste and the Minister for Social Welfare, you are dealing with a Sovereign Government - not another political party, a Government. If the Irish Government conveys to you the view that it believes that meeting in a particular format at a particular time is unhelpful, you should be willing if you accept the good faith of the Government, to accept the Government's advice, because the Government has to make these sort of judgements in light of wider concerns. The Irish Government has a responsibility to decide when and how it holds meetings. [When you are meeting with any Government anywhere you should accept that. If the American Government told you that it was not willing to have a joint meeting, I presume you would accept that. So why not accept it from an Irish Government].

The only people who knew that the Government was unwilling to agree to the joint meeting in question were yourself and Mr. Hume. The Irish Government certainly did not, and had not an interest in, making this communication public. When asked by a reporter who had the facts on the meeting we had no option in honesty but to confirm. The political repercussions of making it public are

ones that were brought about by the person who decided to make it public. The Irish Government had no wish to make it public, and did not do so.

I have made it clear in the Dáil that I am willing to agree to joint meetings in circumstances that involve adequate preparation. We need to know the purpose, agenda and content of any such meeting, [and we need time to communicate with others not attending, so that no other party excluded from the meeting feels that it is left under a misunderstanding or in a state of suspicion about what is actually happening].

I understand John Hume and you are now requesting a meeting at a date early after the Tánaiste and John Hume's return from the U.S. I am satisfied to agree. I will need some days to inform others. I will have you contacted when that has been done.

I see from today's papers that:

"Sinn Féin is understood to have been taken aback by last Friday's indication from the Taoiseach, Mr. Bruton, that the prospect of an Anglo-Irish Summit meeting before President Clinton's visit at the end of November was receding".

A source close to the Peace Process (which I presume to be Sinn Féin) goes on to say that:

"John Bruton is accepting that there won't be movement before Clinton's visit, so where is the pressure for movement going to come from afterwards?".

I would remind you that the Irish Government did agree to a Summit on 6th September. We did so on the basis of having had extensive communications with yourselves about a twin-track approach which involved an International Commission. On the Saturday before the Summit was due to take place, you summoned officials of the Irish Government to Belfast to inform them that the Peace Process would be over if the Summit went ahead on the basis planned, a basis of which you had been aware for quite some time. A person at that meeting referred to "blood" on people's consciences. That was just four days before the proposed Summit!

I hope you will understand that I am therefore somewhat reluctant to set dates for Summits, or to express optimism about likely dates for Summits as the Sinn Féin source seems to want me to do in respect of the Clinton visit. I do not want to see a repeat performance of what happened in Belfast four days before the last Summit.

I would remind you that in calling off the Summit, at the last minute, we did so because we were not satisfied that the British would say what needed to be said in regard to the removal of the condition that there be an instalment of the decommissioning of arms. Calling off the Summit on that basis involved the expenditure of a very large amount of political capital by the Irish Government. This is so for two reasons:

First of all, by calling off the Summit at such short notice we used up considerable political capital with the British. This capital is important to us not only in the context of the Peace Process, but in regard to a whole range of

bilateral and European issues with which we, as a Sovereign Government, have to deal with the British. We did this, because of our concern, about Sinn Féin worries in regard to a request to the IRA for an instalment of decommissioning. I do not think that you appreciate this adequately - we have certainly received no indication from you that you do.

Secondly, it is important for me to stress that in taking this stand in regard to an "instalment", the Irish Government is doing something that is inherently difficult and dangerous for a sovereign democratic Government. We were essentially saying that it was unreasonable to ask an organisation, who holds arms and which under our law has no right to hold them, to give up some of them, in advance of talks. If you think for any length of time, about the position that a Government, like ours, has to have in regard to the holding of arms in its jurisdiction without its consent, you will understand how difficult it was for the Irish Government to take the position it took. We did it because of our concern for the Peace Process, and because we recognise that there are worries in the Republican community in Northern Ireland about giving up arms at this juncture. But it is a position that is fundamentally difficult for an elected sovereign Government to take, in view of the fact that a lot of these arms are held within our jurisdiction, without our consent and against our laws.

I now come to your letter of yesterday.

I will pass over the peremptory tone of the letter, which I would not regard as appropriate to any communication by anybody to the Head of a Sovereign Government with whom they hoped to have productive relations. The

substance of your letter seems to be that you have been left in doubt as to our view about proposals that were tabled by you, with the support of Mr. Hume.

The fact is that you have been left in no doubt from 11th October about our position about these proposals. Mr. Martin McGuinness had a meeting with the Tánaiste on that date and the Tánaiste conveyed the following concerns about the proposals to him. I presume these were conveyed to you. I will list them in a moment, but before doing so I would like to make the point that you proceeded on your own account to negotiate with the British on the basis of these proposals, knowing since the meeting with the Tánaiste that we had reservations about them.

That was your decision, and you are perfectly entitled to negotiate privately with the British yourselves if that is what you want to do. But you have no business pretending that the Irish Government is obliged to support you in particular proposals, if these particular proposals have not been endorsed by the Irish Government. The Irish Government will make policy for itself, and will not have policy made for it by somebody else.

Turning to the 11 October meeting between the Tánaiste and Martin McGuinness, the Tánaiste listed a number of areas where he thought there could be difficulties with the Sinn Fein draft, including the question of a target date versus a specific commitment, the way in which a Commission would actually work: in particular its relationship to the paramilitaries and the question of a specific focus on illegal weapons

At that meeting, it was stressed repeatedly to Sinn Fein that a report which did not convey some constructive and authentic view of the only people who could decommission was likely to lack credibility and therefore to be a potential trap, opening the way for the British to reassert the necessity of "Washington 3".

In addition, the Tánaiste stressed that the British Government would not accept an equivalence between the weapons of the security forces and the weapons of the paramilitaries. He also indicated that the US was unlikely to treat illegal weapons the same as those of the security forces. At the same time, the point was made that there could be no question of Sinn Fein being precluded from dealing with all weapons in their own submission. The question was how any communiqué would strike a balance or an accommodation as between the British and Sinn Fein views. Provided the two sets of weapons were not equated, the British Government themselves accepted that developments in relation to paramilitary weapons had consequences for their own security forces. We suggested that that approach be explored.

There is a genuine problem, I believe, in our communications. I have the feeling that Sinn Féin does not listen to what the Irish Government says. You are very effective at putting your own case forward, and I have no doubt that your case is reinforced by an analysis, within your own terms, of the validity of your position. This analysis does not seem to allow you to hear what other people are saying. I have been explaining to you for several months now that the Irish Government wants to see all parties at the talks. We do not believe that, at the end of the day, talks without the Unionists would mean anything or go anywhere. We believe, in fact, that talks without them would potentially be

an explosive arrangement which could lead to a violent division of opinion between the two communities in the North.

In any event there can be no ultimate agreement without the Unionists. If the Unionists are not at the table from the outset, they will feel alienated by the process and the likelihood of agreement will thereby be reduced. Therefore it is important to take the time necessary to get them to the table.

That is not to say that they have a veto. The Irish Government may have to consider, so long as it has taken every conceivable step to make sure that it would be unreasonable for Unionists to stay away, to go ahead without them. But we are not prepared to go ahead on a basis that would enable Unionists, on presentably reasonable grounds, to stay away from the talks. I do not think that you and Sinn Féin have made any serious effort to take on board these points, even though I have made them to you repeatedly for months now. You do not seem to have the ability to address yourself to the reality that there are two communities in Northern Ireland, not just one. Your entire focus is on the grievances of the Nationalist Community vis-à-vis the British Government. The primary problem is the lack of any meaningful relationship between your community and the Unionist community with whom you share the place in which you live.

For twenty-five years the Republican movement has sought to persuade the Unionists to accept a United Ireland by means of violence. This has involved the shooting of large numbers of members of the Unionist community. There has, also been violence from the Loyalist against the Nationalist community. This process of intimidation of the Unionist community did not work. I do not

know how you can work out that the Unionist community will bend the knee now and turn up at talks, on a basis that is unreasonable from their perspective, if they have been able to resist violence from twenty-five years.

I am willing to put pressure on the Unionist community. I am willing to get the Americans to put pressure on the Unionist community. I am willing to get the Americans to get the British to put pressure on the Unionist Community. But I am only prepared to do that on grounds that I deem are reasonable. And I repeat, I will be the judge of what is reasonable. I am not prepared to be placed in a false position, of pressurising the Unionist community into something that is not reasonable.

You make the point that all party talks are a fundamentally reasonable request. It is made in the context of your insistence that it is reasonable for the IRA to maintain to their entire arsenal of offensive weapons intact for the entire duration of such talks. That insistence is not reasonable. There is no parity of esteem between a political party at a table which has access to arms, and another party at the same table which has no arms, where, as you would wish, the joint convenors of the talks - the Irish and British Governments - are both favouring the point of view of the party with the arms and attempting to persuade the party without the arms that it should change its point of view. That is not a reasonable conjunction of forces at the table. Yet it is fundamentally what you are looking for.

The final and most important question which we need to address is - where are we at now? I have to say at the outset that I am very surprised at the lack of information from you on Monday's meeting between Martin McGuinness and

Michael Ancram. It is imperative that the Irish Government should be as fully informed as possible at this critical juncture - and I must say that it is a very peculiar concept of pan-nationalism which excludes the Irish Government from information of this sort. I would ask you, therefore, to give your full assessment of the current state of your discussions with the British Government. In particular, we would like to know what has been agreed and what precisely the outstanding issues are. I believe it would be useful also that we should agree to put in place a mechanism for ensuring against any communication break-downs in the future.

[As background, the key issues so far as we understand them, are:

- Sinn Fein speaking authoritatively about IRA weapons, (the British account of Tuesday's meeting suggested that this is resolved)
- The use of one of the words illegal/paramilitaries/unauthorised (here again the British version of Tuesday's meeting suggested that the option of not using a word in a Summit Communiqué but all sides stating their preference is a way out of this), and
- the issue of a target - definite date for the start of all party - round table talks (there was no meeting of minds between Michael Ancram and Martin McGuinness on this. It may be that saying two months from the date of a mid November Summit as in the draft letter to Prime Minister Major is the way forward).]