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Conversation with Fr. Alec Reid

20 December, 1995

1. I spoke to Fr. Alec Reid this afternoon so as to reinforce, through that channel also, the concern of the Government at recent developments.
2. Fr. Alec said he had been out of the scene since last April. He thought, viewed somewhat from outside, that there were a number of different factors at work: the main difficulty was that the IRA "foot soldiers" had lost confidence in the political process, and in particular in the prospect of negotiations. Six months ago Adams had the IRA "in the palm of his hand". That was not the case now. The peace process survived only as an act of faith in the leadership, and that was not an indefinite commodity.
3. Secondly, it was crucial to remember that the IRA were always best approached on the basis of offering alternatives, rather than direct denunciation. They had been persuaded to stop violence on the basis of a political alternative, centred around a nationalist consensus. If they saw a shift from issues of justice and concerns of importance to them towards a unionist agenda again, the ordinary membership was more politically astute than people sometimes thought and they could track this.
4. Fr. Reid stressed in general the culture of the IRA as a militaristic organisation. They believed that it was a classic tactic of counter insurgency to call a peace and then "to mess it up". That meant maximum confusion for the insurgents, and increased information flow, etc., for the authorities. Many were convinced that this was the present British tactic and that the



British did not intend to have negotiations. If that were the case, then they would be drawing consequences from all of this.

5. I stressed the dangers of a vicious circle, whereby the ceasefire unravelled at the margins, and that in turn diminished the political will and capacity of the Governments to respond to the situation in ways that might reinforce the peace. Fr. Reid accepted the danger and accepted that many of the IRA leadership would understand that fully, but again stressed that they were subject to pressures from within their own organisation, and that Sinn Féin's influence on them was greatly diminished. .
6. I made the point that these murders were surely "military operations" supposed to have been ended. Fr. Reid gave a long response on the absence of an acceptable police force, the dangers of drugs and the incentives within the community to protect themselves. I pointed out that there would be world outrage if a police force ever resorted to even a shadow of the methods now being used, and that there was a very blatant double morality at work.
7. I asked Fr. Reid for his overall assessment of prospects: Could we look forward to a peaceful new year in 1996? In spite of his rather sombre account of pressures within the IRA, and diminished influence of the Sinn Féin leadership, he did not seem overly pessimistic. He felt that as long as Hume and Adams held together, nationalists could see the political benefits in terms of their joint influence, President Clinton's visit, etc. He also expressed his faith that the Holy Spirit would sustain the peace.



Sean Ó hUiginn

20 December 1995