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Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

17 July, 1995.

The Right Honourable John Major, MP,
Prime Minister.

Dear John

I have considered a report of the discussions between Rod Lyne and Paddy Teahon last week-end.

I know you share and support the determination of the Irish Government to use the unprecedented opportunity of the ceasefires to consolidate the peace process and make it irreversible. That requires the process to be underpinned by political negotiation and agreement - the unquestioned goal of both Governments from the very beginning.

The main point that unites us at the moment is that we are both seeking inclusive all-party talks at the earliest possible date.

It would be a cause of concern to me if a perception were allowed to develop that you have adopted a tacit policy of seeking simply to mesh the ceasefires with the status quo, with minimal change in policy.

The success of our endeavours to date has lain in the willingness of both our Governments to risk challenging all sides to consider and agree a new and

balanced accommodation. Any change in that perception will have the most direct imaginable impact on the climate of opinion and political momentum we need to maintain.

I am particularly concerned that the British Government's approach to our shared goal of decommissioning, which I, like you, have sought to advance in every way possible, is now threatening to become a serious obstacle in our path.

Any reduction in stocks of illegally-held weapons is an important gain, and we will continue to pursue that goal in every way possible. However, as I set down clearly in my pre-Cannes letter and paper on decommissioning our analysis of the likelihood and feasibility of a decommissioning instalment is fundamentally at odds with yours.

Our particular concern on this issue is that full decommissioning is in our view attainable in parallel with an acceptable agreed political settlement but that insistence on an "instalment" may well mean that we never reach full decommissioning.

In our view the John Chilcot/Tim Dalton discussions since Cannes had created the basis for moving the peace/talks process forward without your having to insist on an "instalment" or without your having at this stage to drop that condition. We believe a Commission provides a way forward acceptable to both Governments.

We will always push for the maximum decommissioning which can be attained but we must also be conscious that a disproportionate focus on the "instalment" which destabilises the much more central goal of keeping the guns silent, or jeopardises our essential and fundamental goal of a full decommissioning of all arms, would be seen as self-defeating.

If notwithstanding the reservations I have set out - in this letter - you decide on the basis of intelligence information different to ours that an "instalment" can be attained without fundamental damage to the peace/talks process, then I

would wish to understand that you are doing so in the belief that the "instalment" is the key to unlocking the door to fully inclusive all-party negotiations for an acceptable, agreed political settlement. In particular I would wish to understand that in your firm and informed view, the "instalment" provides the basis for Unionist acceptance of participation in such all-party negotiations and that we will not, if an instalment is delivered, see further objection to all party talks from them at that point, on the grounds that the instalment is inadequate.

Should you decide to proceed as indicated I believe you should decide upon two associated measures:

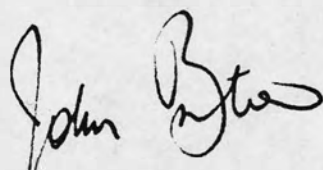
- to characterise your discussions with Sinn Fein simply as discussions and to remove the exploratory "label".
- in my view most particularly important, to move on the prisoners issue by:
 - . indicating that your Government will bring forward legislation to restore 50% remission as soon as possible
 - . changing the visiting and maintenance conditions in the UK
 - . reducing the qualifying period for "home leave"
 - . having the Life Sentence Review Board now reconsider cases in Northern Ireland, and
 - . easing the tensions which have arisen due to conditions applying to republican prisoners in England.

I believe this latter prisoners issue will become an even more difficult and emotive issue with both communities in Northern Ireland if your Government does not move and if there is a perception of "trade off" for decommissioning. The idea that, in the aftermath of the Clegg decision, other life prisoners, who have served much longer time, are in some way being held hostage for arms would inflame opinion in some quarters in a quite irrational way. Recent developments on the streets encouraged by factions in the leadership of both

traditions and the danger of an escalation of "dirty protest" are a fundamental worry to us.

On our side we have decided to undertake a further significant release of prisoners and improvement in conditions for others before end July.

I trust that I have stated my concerns clearly. I would be happy to discuss them with you at any time.



John Boyer

Taoiseach