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29 November, 1996.

Mr. Seán O hUiginn,
Second Secretary,
Anglo-Irish Division,
Department of Foreign Affairs,
St. Stephen's Green,
DUBLIN 2.

COPY TO:
✓ ST
✓ PDS
MR P TEAHON
MR S. DONLON
MR T. DALTON

m. Keen
5.11.96

Dear Secretary,

Meeting with John Holmes

As agreed I met with John Holmes in No.10 this morning for an hour to discuss the publication yesterday of the Prime Minister's statement and the outlook for the Summit on 9 December.

At the outset I conveyed the depth of feeling in Dublin at the British actions. I pointed out that they had ignored the Taoiseach's direct and reasoned request not to publish the statement and had given only the most cursory and barely recognisable treatment of the two points he had specifically requested them to make. Moreover Paddy Teahon wanted Holmes to know that he regarded himself as having been shabbily treated. Holmes had reassured him last week that there was no basis for Trimble's announcement after his meeting with the Prime Minister that the statement would be published this Thursday. In the event Trimble had been proved correct. And Holmes had also undertaken to inform Paddy in advance of any intention to publish. He had not been so informed. Beyond these issues of treatment, which were more than matters of diplomatic courtesy, we had grave fears of the consequences of the British Government's actions for the Peace Process and for our joint interest in having

the IRA ceasefire restored. Some of these had been set out in the Taoiseach's letter.

Holmes responded immediately. He said that after Trimble's meeting with the Prime Minister he had told Paddy Teahon that they had no plans to publish the statement this Thursday and that had been true and accurate at the time. The Prime Minister had said to Trimble that he would most likely publish before the end of the month and it was Trimble who had drawn the conclusion that the probable date of publication would be at PM's Question Time this week. But it was emphatically not the case that the British Government had intended all along to publish on Thursday or that he (Holmes) knew of any such intention. On the question of notification it was unfortunately the case that the decision to publish had been taken only yesterday morning at Cabinet. He therefore had no opportunity to convey the decision in the way he had undertaken to do, and he regretted this. He hoped that the affair would not damage his long-term relationship with Paddy.

Insofar as the Taoiseach's requests to the Prime Minister were concerned the reality was that they had been made too late. The decision to publish had already been taken but the Government had tried to reflect the Taoiseach's two points in the Prime Minister's reply in the House and in the statement that accompanied the policy document. In retrospect it would have been better if the two men had had an opportunity to speak earlier than they did.

I said that I found this explanation astounding. What he was saying was that the telephone call had been set up for a time when the British side knew that the decision to publish might well be taken by Cabinet and that any arguments that we might have could not really be taken into account. We could not understand the great hurry particularly in the light of what was at stake. We were not aware of any overwhelming pressure to go public at this stage. To the first point Holmes could only respond on the formal grounds that no one could have known for certain what the Cabinet decision was going to be. To the second he said that the pressures were not all public. The Prime Minister was under pressure from Tory backbenchers and members of his Cabinet, especially after Adams's statement earlier in the week. They had taken the view that further time would not change things in any fundamental way.

The conversation then turned to the prospects for the future. I said that our fears of the consequences of the British actions had been set out in the Taoiseach's letter. A great deal of damage had been done but we would still

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wish to explore the possibility of creating the basis for a restoration of the ceasefire and the entry of Sinn Féin into inclusive talks. In our view the steps outlined in the British paper for Sinn Féin's entry were inadequate. If Sinn Féin were going to persuade the IRA to restore the ceasefire they would need greater certainty than the open-ended process proposed. That was why the Taoiseach had proposed that, certain conditions being fulfilled, Sinn Féin should be invited to join the talks from their resumption on a fixed date. I had noted from Jonathan Stephens' conversations with you and with Philip McDonagh that yesterday's statement was not intended to rule out any particular timescale or scenario and that there was "still all to play for". In these circumstances could we envisage working to develop yesterday's unilateral statement into a joint understanding that would encompass the idea of a fixed date? Holmes said that he was unaware of what Stephens had said but that nothing had been ruled out. They were not closing doors. However he could not say "if all were well on 30 January that Sinn Féin could participate in the talks from that date". The Republican Movement would not only have to say convincing things but demonstrate their commitment on the ground. It was really up to them. What was important was not what the Irish Government said but what the IRA did.

Holmes then turned to what he called the Irish/American proposals for "the establishment of a fixed date in the knowledge that a ceasefire was being called and assurances given to the US Government about IRA actions". They were still thinking about this but it was very difficult and he had real doubts if such a package could be sold to the Cabinet and to the Conservative Party. I said that I found it difficult to conceive of how in those circumstances the IRA could renege on any undertakings given. There would always be some element of risk but it was minimal and the prize of bringing Sinn Féin into the political process and of inclusive talks was worth it.

Holmes wondered if the talks would in fact be inclusive. It was clear that the DUP would withdraw and this would put impossible pressure on the UUP to do likewise. The British Government could try to persuade Trimble to stay in and might succeed, but we had to realise that in the run up to the election Trimble was very jittery and was fearful of being outmanoeuvred by Paisley. British Ministers were very sensitive to this point. This was more than a question of electoral politics and the Westminster numbers game. The Unionists also had their sensitivities and needs which required legitimate attention.

On the IRA Holmes said that the British had what he called a "different vision" to ours on the organisation's intentions. It was clear that some in the Republican Movement, he mentioned Adams and McGuinness, were keen on a ceasefire and wanted to pursue a political strategy. But this was because 1) they realised that there was nowhere else for them to go and 2) they wanted to maximise their electoral opportunities and appeal. From their knowledge of the discussions within the IRA (he implied that they had **intelligence information** on certain meetings) the **British knew that the motivation for consideration of a renewed ceasefire was tactical. Any move to institute a permanent ceasefire now would split the Movement and it was the British belief that the IRA would not take that risk.**

I said that all this sounded as if British Ministers could not seriously contemplate a fixed date for Sinn Fein's entry and if so it might be better to come clean on the issue. He repeated that it was not ruled out but it would be very difficult. He could not be optimistic. **Things were not helped by remarks from Dublin implying that the British did not have a right to make a unilateral statement and that the British Government could be pulled into line. Northern Ireland was a part of the UK.** They had every right to outline British policy. I said that I thought we had gone beyond that kind of attitude for many years now. We had a joint interest in a permanent and peaceful settlement to the Northern conflict. The two countries had developed a high degree of cooperation based on the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing St Declaration, the Framework Document and several Communiqués including that of 28 February. None of that could be set aside. We were condemned to work together and from the point of view of the Irish Government we wanted to work together. In our view there was a serious prospect of a renewed ceasefire in the right conditions and we should bend our efforts to achieve that.

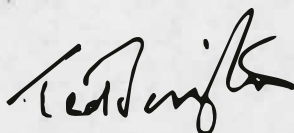
As requested by Paddy Teahon I indicated that Sean Donlon would be seeing the British Ambassador in Dublin to, inter alia outline the outcome of last night's meeting with Sinn Fein. I gave as the main points of Adam's response

- (1) that the British had rejected the Hume/Adams initiative and that that initiative was now over
- (2) that the Prime Minister had chosen David Trimble over John Hume
- (3) that regrettably the militants in the IRA could now give their response

- (4) that Adams will be arguing against such a response; but he could not give comfort on the point and
- (5) Adams has asked if he could meet with Irish officials again next week to explore if a new initiative could be developed to renew the IRA ceasefire.

At the end we had a brief exchange on the arrangements for the Taoiseach's visit on 9 December. Holmes said that they envisaged beginning at 11 am with European issues for about an hour and a half, taking up Northern Ireland over lunch. This would allow a change of teams on both sides. Lunch would run up to about 2.30 pm after which there would be a meeting with the press. They had not yet decided on the press format but were inclined to do it outside No10. The Foreign Secretary would probably join the Prime Minister for discussion on the European Council.

Yours sincerely



Ted Barrington
Ambassador