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FOR: BRIGID BYRNE/EMBASSY, LONDON

FROM: K. DOWLING

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Comments by Martha Pope on BBC Radio Ulster Newsbreak, 2 December 1996

Commentator: The Chairman of the talks process, George Mitchell, says there's no truth in allegations that one of his senior aides and a former IRA man are romantically involved. Newspaper reports had suggested that Martha Pope was linked to Gerard Kelly but Mr Mitchell insisted the allegations were absolutely and totally false. Ms Pope has also denied that she ever met Mr Kelly. Yesterday he described the report as total rubbish.

Pope: I'm just trying to make it clear to anybody that asks that there's no truth whatsoever to the story. It is completely false, I have never met Mr Kelly ever.

Update on BBC Radio Ulster Newsbreak

Commentator: Martha Pope, Senator George Mitchell's aide has denied any connection at all with Gerry Kelly the prominent Sinn Féin activist. Two Sunday newspapers suggested they'd met often but Ms Pope says this story is completely without foundation.

Pope: I'm really just sticking to the factual allegation and the basis for it and there is none.

Interviewer: Some people, Martha, are suggesting that this is a smear tactic?

Pope: Well, I haven't speculated on that at all. I am just trying to make it clear to anybody that asks that there's no truth whatsoever to the story, it is completely false, I have never met Mr Kelly ever.

Interviewer: Are you taking legal action?

Pope: I am seeking advice from a solicitor.

END.