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Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

28th November, 1996.

The Rt. Hon. John Major, M.P.,
Prime Minister

Dear John

I was particularly disturbed to learn just before our 'phone call that you had unilaterally decided to publish the text of your communication to John Hume, M.P., M.E.P.

Progress in relation to the difficult situation which both Irish and British Governments have faced over the last twenty five years has been made only when both Governments have found it possible to synchronise their policies and approaches.

Since I became Taoiseach, I have sought at all times to proceed in this matter on the basis of agreement with you. It is in this spirit that my Government has in recent months been working with you in support of the Hume initiative

The objective - our joint objective - was to achieve a ceasefire, one that was credible and unequivocal.

The only purpose of your publishing a statement, whenever that might be done, was to achieve that ceasefire.

As I hope I made clear in our call, to proceed this afternoon in the certain knowledge that it will not achieve its purpose will simply convince the Republican Movement that the whole exercise was tactical and manifestly aimed at some objective other than a ceasefire. Premature publication in the

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way proposed will make our attempts to restore a ceasefire immeasurably more difficult.

What will happen I fear is that Hume/Adams will publish their proposal and a most confrontational debate about British attitudes to the peace process will take place. I will, in these circumstances, have to make my own position abundantly clear.

The outcome will then be a rift in Anglo-Irish relations with appalling potential consequences for both Governments and for all our people.

It is my judgement imperative, if your decision to publish is irrevocable, that the text of your article be accompanied by an agreed public indication of the two Government's support for the following course of action:

- there would be an early Christmas break next week in the talks of approximately two months to last until 30th January
- that in the event of an IRA declaration now of the unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire, and of Sinn Féin signing up to the Mitchell principles with both Governments early after that declaration, and further, provided that there is adherence both to the cessation and to the Mitchell principles, Sinn Féin would be invited to join the talks from their resumption on 30th January.

I urgently await the response which you promised me on this.

Your sincerely

John
Taoiseach.

(16)

28/11/96

**GOVERNMENT STATEMENT
ON NORTHERN IRELAND**

The Government wishes to set out the facts about recent contacts with John Hume and explain its position on the possibility of a new IRA ceasefire.

Mr. Hume has suggested to the Prime Minister over the last few months that a new IRA ceasefire, which would in his view this time become permanent, is available if the Government clarifies its position on various issues, including the nature of the Belfast talks, decommissioning and possible future confidence-building measures.

The Prime Minister has consistently made clear the Government's position that we would welcome a new ceasefire but that we are sceptical about how credible it would be. The Prime Minister has also said from the start that there could be no question of changing our policy, or negotiating with Sinn Fein, to achieve a new ceasefire, which should be declared without further prevarication.

However, he has added that he was prepared to re-state existing policy if that would help.

The Prime Minister accordingly gave Mr. Hume in July the terms of a possible re-statement. Mr. Hume subsequently suggested different forms of words which did not, however, properly reflect the Government's position. The Prime Minister sent Mr. Hume a further text on 23 November. This text included our views, in the light of continuing IRA attacks, notably on the Thiepval Barracks, Lisburn, on the terms and process of entry to apply after any restored IRA ceasefire.

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This British Government text is attached. It describes a position which we believe to be fair, balanced and reasonable.

If Sinn Fein want to join the talks, it is for the IRA to declare a restoration of their ceasefire in terms which are convincingly unequivocal, indicate the intention that this ceasefire should be lasting, and reflect commitment to exclusively peaceful means. The fulfilment of paragraph 8 of Command Paper 3232 is directly relevant to this ("parties ... which ... establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process"). If this was followed by the absence of paramilitary activity, including such confidence-building factors as no targeting, surveillance and weapons preparation, the way would be open for the Secretary of State to invite Sinn Fein to participate in the negotiations on an equal basis with other parties, in accordance with the legislation setting up the talks.

The talks are likely to break for Christmas soon and to resume in January at a date yet to be agreed. The statement attached does not determine how early Sinn Fein can join the talks after a ceasefire. That depends on the words and deeds of the IRA and Sinn Fein. We need to see an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire and to make a credible judgement that it is lasting. We need to know that Sinn Fein will sign up to the Mitchell principles. The Government is not erecting new hurdles or seeking delay. We wish to see inclusive talks involving all parties as soon as possible.

But if Sinn Fein continue to exclude themselves from the talks, the talks must of course go on without them.

28 November 1996

(10), (25) + (27)

Suggested points for Taoiseach's call

- We appreciate your difficulties and the risks you are prepared to take for peace.
- We would not ask you to take them unless we felt a genuine restoration was on offer.
- We need an entry scenario which meets your need for a waiting period, and the Sinn Féin need for equal (or at least not embarrassingly unequal) treatment once a ceasefire is declared.
- An ostensibly routine Christmas recess in the Talks from early December to late January might bridge this gap.
- If Sinn Féin have various meetings with the British, ourselves and possibly Americans in the interval for discussion and reciprocal confidence-building, that will enable them to meet your scenario without too much loss of face.
- They would need however some solid commitment that they will be fully in the talks upon resumption (end January), assuming the ceasefire is observed. They cannot deliver a ceasefire for an open-ended, vague scenario.
- We continue to press them for positive language in any ceasefire statement, to help the presentation at your end.
- I appreciate the pressures on you to issue your "Hume" statement and will try to conclude matters urgently, but it is vital that it should be part of an agreed scenario to achieve its objective.

- We can suggest amendments to your draft to cover the new scenario.
- We must also think through the Talks process to the end of this British parliament and beyond.
- We will try very hard to keep the UUP (and consequently the loyalist parties) at the table, and help your own efforts in every way we can.
- In a worst-case scenario (where Trimble leaves), we should choose to view the process (and therefore also the Forum) as continuing (even if temporarily incapable of serious business).
- We would use the process to seek to persuade the unionists back and also to do at least some uncontroversial Strand Three preparations, consulting the parties extensively, as they themselves envisage.
- With luck we might "bed down" an inclusive process before your general election.
- I believe Sinn Féin are realistic about the limits, provided the Governments have a good faith commitment to pursuing meaningful and comprehensive negotiations.
- It is very important also that any restored ceasefire should work, since a second collapse would be fatal for the credibility of this approach.

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27/11/96

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Not a question of acceptance or rejection. We have set out to John Hume in clear and positive terms our policy, including the basis on which Sinn Fein could join talks. We have made it clear we are ready to do so publicly.

In setting this out to John Hume, we have reasserted the existing policy of the British Government. There has never been any question of negotiating a new position.

To C Delaney

From C Wulfer

*The above was given out to journalists
last night. It was not a statement.*

CW 26/11

*Rec'd 12.30pm
008
27/11*

PST, PSS
S/S Ó hUiginn
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Messrs. Teahon, Donlon & Dalton
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Joint Secretary + Section