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To: Secretary Gallagher

From: Michael Moloney

No. of Pages: 11

c.c.: Press Section

Subject: Press briefing by Jim Steinberg on Clinton's visit to Ireland

The Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Jim Steinberg, gave a briefing today to the White House Press Corps on President Clinton's visit to Ireland. During the briefing Mr. Steinberg made the following points:

- Steinberg welcomed and said the US was "very encouraged" by "a number of developments which are very positive" - including the "very important and categorical" statement from Gerry Adams, the calling of the preparatory meeting of Assembly leaders and the announcement of the appointment of Martin McGuinness to meet with the Decommissioning Body.

- Steinberg confirmed that the White House had been in contact with Sinn Fein prior to yesterday's statement by Adams, but that this was part of the regular contact maintained by the White House with all the parties in Northern Ireland.

- On being asked whether the White House had supplied Sinn Fein with language, Steinberg said the US urged all parties, particularly those associated with paramilitary organisations, to renounce violence. He recalled the President's remarks in Belfast in 1995 when he called for all to say that the "day is gone for violence" - words he said were echoed in Mr. Adams's statement yesterday.

- On being asked if the Adams's statement contained everything the White House wanted, Steinberg replied that Adams's words were "strong and unequivocal" and that there continued to be challenges ahead and the President still strongly

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supports moving forward with decommissioning, as required by the Agreement. "It is word and deed" - he said.

- "The President favours talk" Steinberg said when asked whether he felt Sinn Fein had met Mr. Trimble's requirements - "The President has urged dialogue and discussion, and he will continue to do so".

- Steinberg said the US will continue to play a supporting role in the ongoing process. He gave credit to the two Governments and the "tremendous leadership" of the Taoiseach and PM Blair and he also praised Irish-America for its strong support of the process and said the President had been able to rally a sense in the US that the Irish-American community "wants no violence and wants a political process."

- Steinberg said in the aftermath of Omagh, there was obviously no support for the method or the goals of those who continue to support violence. He said that while there may be more bombs in the future, it will be impossible for "a small minority who is now essentially reviled by the vast majority of the people" to derail the process. He said the process would ultimately succeed because of a consensus in the community and a set of institutions in place that allow people to pursue their aspirations through a political process.

- Mr. Steinberg continued by saying that this process was still "a work in progress" and that the parties now have to transform the commitments given in the Good Friday Agreement "to actions on the ground that change the lives of the people" - the kind of changes that will allow the people to believe the process is going to work. This, Steinberg said, would be the message the President would be conveying to all the political leaders he would be meeting in Northern Ireland.

A transcript of the briefing is attached.

Michael Moloney
Embassy, Washington
September 2, 1998

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WHITE HOUSE BRIEFING ROOM

September 2, 1998

PRESS BRIEFING BY JIM STEINBERG, DEPUTY ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS, AND MIKE MCCURRY

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Moscow, Russia)

For Immediate Release September 2, 1998

5:42 P.M. (L)

MR. STEINBERG: As we finish our important discussions here in Moscow, I wanted to give you a little bit of preview of the events, particularly of tomorrow, in Northern Ireland. Actually, the White House activities in Northern Ireland are beginning as we speak. The First Lady has just arrived in Northern Ireland, where she will be concluding the two and a half day Vital Voices Discussion, which has brought together women's NGOs and groups from both Northern Ireland and the United States. It's been a very important and well-received conference. Most of the leaders of the political parties in Northern Ireland have spoken at the conference, and it is going to have a lot of follow-on in terms of long-lasting partnerships between organizations in Northern Ireland and the United States. A number of administration officials have been participating in that.

I think while there may be some disagreements on the issue of use of force in the discussions today, there is less and less disagreement in Northern Ireland on the question of violence. Over the last several days, we've seen a number of developments which are very positive in terms of generating momentum in support of the peace

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process there. The tragic events at Drum Creexx** and Omagh have given a new impetus, I think. It has more and more marginalized those who would try to use violence to achieve political means and given strength to those who were supporters of the agreement that was overwhelmingly approved by voters in north and south.

Among the important developments of recent days, as many of you know, yesterday the head of Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams, made a very important statement in which he indicated that the violence in support of the political process is over, done with, and gone. It's a very important and categorical statement, one that was welcomed by the President, by Prime Minister Blair, by the Taoiseach, Bernie Ahern, and all the major political parties in Northern Ireland, including David Trimble, the head of the Ulster Unionists.

In other events which are happening is that Mr. Trimble, who is the first minister and Seamus Mallon, the Deputy First Minister, will be convening the leaders of all of the parties, probably next Monday, to try to begin the work of preparing for the beginning of the Assembly, which will start in mid-September -- September 14th and 15th. And as we speak, Martin McGuiness, a senior figure in Sinn Fein, has announced that he will act as the overseer for Sinn Fein in connection with decommissioning, which is, again, another positive step along the process towards making the Good Friday agreement a reality and giving support for putting the process into effect.

The President's visit, I think, can be seen in this context as trying to give further impetus to the peace process.

When he arrives tomorrow, the first event will be a meeting first with the two leaders, David Trimble and Seamus Mallon, and then individual discussions with the leaders of all the political parties at Stormont. Although this is not a formal meeting of the Assembly, it is part of this process in which the preparatory work is getting ready for the first formal meetings of the Assembly and, as I say, giving a real sense of opportunity and movement, which is very important in the early days of this work.

The President will then go from there to give a major address on the task ahead at Waterfront Hall in Belfast, which is both a symbol of the renewal and the opportunity that the peace process has made possible. And by speaking more formally to the members of the Assembly there, he will have a chance to give his

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perspective on those issues.

I think from there, as you probably know, the President is going to go to Springvale, where he will undertake a ground-breaking of a new community center that's going to involve education not only for young people but for lifelong learning, which is not only important in terms of opportunity for the people of Belfast but also reflects a priority of his own, which is the need to make sure that people have the skills they need to take advantage of the new opportunities that are going to be available as the peace process deepens.

He will then go from there to Omagh, the site of the terrible bombing of a few weeks ago, which is not only an opportunity to remember the victims but also to talk about the process of healing and reconciliation.

From there he will go to Armagh, for a gathering for peace, where those of you who will be joining us there will have an opportunity to hear Mary Black, who will headline the program, and a number of the leaders of the process.

So we're very encouraged by some of the developments that we've seen over recent days. There is obviously a lot of work to go forward, and the President will speak in some detail to that when he speaks at Waterfront Hall. But I think that, as I say, this week is a week of very encouraging statements that we see all the parties responding to the challenge. And it's something that we all very much welcome.

Any questions?

Q Did the White House have any involvement in drafting the Adams statement on violence?

MR. STEINBERG. The statement was a statement from the parties. We've obviously encouraged for some time for all the parties, including Sinn Fein, to give an unequivocal statement. It's something that we have urged on them and something that we welcome the fact that they've done it. But the drafting of the statement is not something that we did ourselves.

Q The White House did not suggest language or in any way help --

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MR. STEINBERG: I think other than to suggest unequivocally about what the message ought to be, we did not draft language. We have been in contact with Sinn Fein. We are regularly in contact with all the parties. This has been a priority for us because, as those of you who go back to it will recall, in 1995, when the President was in Belfast, he called on all the parties, particularly those associated with the paramilitary movements to renounce -- I mean, the language he used at the time was that the day is gone for violence. And so I think it's a positive sense in that the words that Mr. Adams used echoed what the President had to say three years ago. But we did not suggest specific language.

Q If I could just wrap up this line of questioning, is the Adams statement one hundred percent of what the White House and the President wanted to hear?

MR. STEINBERG: I think that in terms of a statement that is a statement we very much hoped to hear. As I said, it was welcomed by all the parties committed to the process as well as the two leaders. Now, of course, but there are still challenges ahead, because that is the language, but we still want to see the actions. The administration, the President still strong supports moving forward with decommissioning, as required under the agreement. So as we have always said, it's word and deed. But I think that these are very strong and unequivocal words, and for that reason they're quite welcome.

Q Two questions. One, will the President be encouraging in his talks with Trimble, will he be encouraging Trimble to drop his refusal to speak directly to Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein? And secondly, both sides agree that the U.S. has played a critical role in getting the peace process to this stage. How would you define the U.S. role from here on in?

MR. STEINBERG: First, in terms of discussions between the leaders of the parties, we've said from the beginning we think it's very important for all the parties, particularly those who are positively supporters of the agreement, to work together to make this work; that the without communities and leaders of all the parties have to be able to work together to find ways to resolve their differences, to develop compromises, to make a political process work.

What we're seeing here and what we so strongly support is the transformation of this from a war in the streets to a true political process in which the people of

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Northern Ireland have their own institutions that give them an opportunity to have a say over their own lives, to shape their own destiny. That's only going to work if it's politics in its classic sense, in which they come together, they discuss, they debate, disagree, but try to find ways through their problems. So there is going to be a need for conversations and engagement in all kinds of different fora, and the more of that the better, as far as we're concerned.

In terms of our role, this is something where the United States has seen itself in a supporting role to, in the first instance, the political parties themselves in Northern Ireland, and the two governments, which have had the lead and deserve the lion's share of the credit for what's been accomplished. It's been the courage of the political parties who took these steps, supported by tremendous leadership by Prime Minister Blair and the Taoiseach, Bernie Ahern, as well as their predecessors -- Prime Minister Major and John Burton, who brought this to pass.

I think it's also fair to say that the President has been deeply engaged in these issues, has really believed that this is a process that we ought to support, and that through our engagement, both politically and economically, that we can provide support for those who are taking risks for peace, something that the President has personally been engaged in. And I think that we are able to both to give backing to those there and to give a sense that the United States is really going to support those who make those decisions, that has a real impact.

And I also want to -- I think some of the credit goes to Irish America, which has also been a very strong supporter of this process. The President has been able to rally a very, very broadly based sense in the United States that the American Irish community also wants no violence, wants a political process. And I think that very strong message from the White House, both from the White House and from the people of the United States, has had a big impact on the process.

Q Jim, you spoke about the Omagh bombing having marginalized some of those actors, but what difference does it make if they're marginalized? I mean, if there is still a committed minority, however small it is, that wants to kill the peace process, what leads you to believe that that won't be effective?

MR. STEINBERG: I'm convinced that if it is a very small minority who is now essentially reviled by the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland, that it will

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be impossible for them to derail this process.

The difficulty before is that we didn't have a political process around which the people who wanted peace could rally. There was nothing to cling on to, there was nothing to support. And you had too many people sort of feeling a sense of hopelessness so that the people who use violence, while even though not supported by the majority, still had some sense that there was a legitimacy to their objectives. Now it's clear that it's not. I mean, the statements that Sinn Fein has made about the so-called "real IRA" are very unequivocal in condemning it. And I think in a situation like that obviously you can't rule out the possibility that there will be continued acts of violence. But I don't believe that terrorists can operate effectively in an environment where the vast, vast majority not only don't support their methods, but don't support their goals.

You can see the fact that the people who were associated with the real IRA and their political arm, the 32-country group, are on the run. They're defensive, they're unwilling to stand up and defend the actions that they've taken. And I think it's a very powerful message. Again, that's not to say there won't be more bombs. There will always be more bombs. But I think when you have both a consensus in a community and a set of institutions that allow people to pursue their aspirations through a political process, that the process can succeed.

Q It sounds like what you're saying is the war is over, a statement that Gerry Adams felt he couldn't make. Do you think the real IRA are the wrong -- the traditional IRA with a cease-fire, Sinn Fein says violence is no longer an option --

MR. STEINBERG. I think there's a real opportunity. I think that obviously this is still a work in progress, that the parties have to transform the very strong commitments that they made in word and writing, both in the Good Friday agreement itself and in the statements we're hearing from party leaders, to actions on the ground that change the lives of the people. The people have to see the kinds of changes that allow them to believe that this process is going to work.

But we're on the right path and the events of the last couple of days are really encouraging. It's sort of the beginning of a new year, of a new opportunity for the people of Northern Ireland, and an opportunity for a really strong start for the new Assembly.

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Q Given the historic linkages, do you think there's a possibility that Sinn Fein or the IRA could share information about the real IRA with the authorities in Ireland or Britain?

MR. STEINBERG: I would certainly hope that all those people who are committed to the peace process and committed to exclusively peaceful means would make clear that they are not going to in any way harbor or protect those who use violence. I'm not going to predict from here what will be done, but it's certainly the strong message that the President will bring and that we are bringing, that there should be no harboring and no condoning in any way these absolutely reprehensible acts, such as the action in response to Dumcree or the bombings in Omagh. There's just no place for it and there should be no shelter for those people.

Q Will the President have a message for those Unionists who are against the agreement, who politically don't agree with the agreement and think it's selling out the Unionists' position on union with Great Britain.

MR. STEINBERG: I think one of the things that all along the President has made very clear is that he has been a very strong supporter of the principle of consent. And this is something that for many Unionists was an important principle. It's one of the things that was a hallmark of the Good Friday agreement: that nothing will be done and nothing will be changed in terms of the political status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the people. And I think that that's a very reassuring message to all communities, but particularly to many in the Unionist community who have made that important.

I think that the President is going to say, you have a chance for a political process here. You're going to have disagreements on issues, but it's a democratic process in which you will be able to fully express your views. And I think in that sense it's an opportunity for all of the Unionist community as well as the Nationalist community.

Q Is he meeting Reverend Paisley?

MR. STEINBERG: I expect that Reverend Paisley will be at the meeting with

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the political leaders at Stormont tomorrow morning; I have no indication to the contrary.

Q Will he meet him individually?

MR. STEINBERG: He will meeting individually with one or two or three leaders of each of the groups. I can't tell you whether it's -- you know, it's probably going to be more than the Reverend Paisley by himself, but it will be with two or three of the leaders of the DUP.

Q Jim, just a follow-up to the earlier question. Will he tell Mr. Trimble that he believes the Sinn Fein has met Mr. Trimble's requirements and therefore he should sit down and talk with Gerry Adams?

MR. STEINBERG: I think the President has on previous occasions urged the parties not to put too many preconditions on discussion. There are a lot of issues in terms of the opportunity to -- in terms of what the legal requirements are and various aspects of participating in the activities of the Assembly and the like.

But the President favors talk -- even before issues had been fully resolved, the dialogue and the opportunity to discuss these issues is extremely important. And so consistently the President has urged dialogue and discussion, and he will continue to do so.

Q Jim, how much time has the President got to prepare for the trip to Ireland, given the heavy schedule he's had here in Moscow and before he got here?

MR. STEINBERG: Well, as I think you know, the President spends a lot of time and has a deep personal engagement. It's not as if this is something his attention has been away from for a period of time. He's had a number of phone calls over the past weeks with the leaders, with Prime Minister Blair, with the Taoiseach. So he's quite engaged and we discuss this daily with him, have for a number of weeks in anticipation of the trip.

But also it's been a rolling process, as you know. The President was deeply involved in helping to bring the agreement about, in supporting the referendum, in supporting the process that led to the selection of the Assembly members, in dealing

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with the consequences of the violence this summer. And so it's something that is continuously part of his work and something he has a lot of -- he comes up to speed even as we begin to prepare for the final days of the trip.

Q But just to follow on your answer on Paisley, given that Paisley has condemned the President's involvement in this, said he wasn't welcome in Northern Ireland, refused to condemn the killing of the three boys, why would the President want to meet with Paisley?

MR. STEINBERG: He's a democratically elected leader. We fundamentally disagree with some of the principles that Reverend Paisley has taken. But for the very reason, as I said, that the President urged dialogue among all the parties, I think it's appropriate for the President to meet with democratically elected leaders -- particularly, although we disagree with him, it is certainly the case that they have not advocated violence. And the President believes very strongly in the situation that -- he will have a chance to have a discussion.

He doesn't have great illusions that he will necessarily convince Reverend Paisley of what we're trying to accomplish or what our role ought to be. But we know that the vast majority of the parties and the people welcome the President coming there and I think the President feels that it's an opportunity for Reverend Paisley and all the party leaders to have a chance to say their piece and he's ready to answer them in turn.

Q Is the President bringing any new business initiatives or investment initiatives to --

MR. STEINBERG: Well, we're working on a number of initiatives, working through the international fund for Ireland and also working with some of the grassroots community leaders to help stimulate investment. Secretary Daley was there with the trade mission earlier this year, in June; he will be part of this delegation.

We have some things that are sort of on the verge of ripening and we'll just have to see tomorrow whether -- I think that, again, I think he's going to be able to talk a little bit about some of the initiatives that we have under way, some of which are near to fruition but not quite there. But he will be talking about some of that tomorrow.

END.

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