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5 October 1998

Counsellor A1

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Secretary,

**Ambassador's conversation with Gerry Adams**

Ambassador Barrington, accompanied by myself, met Gerry Adams for half an hour on Tuesday afternoon 29 September. The meeting took place by pre-arrangement at a room in the Winter Gardens in Blackpool and was direct and friendly in tone.

**Decommissioning and the Shadow Executive**

Adams complimented the Ambassador on his "outreach" at the Labour Party Conference and began at once to talk about the current political impasse. He said that mistrust of Unionist intentions was beginning to crystallise among republican "activists" and that it would not help the Agreement to miss the deadline of 31 October for the decision on a North-South work programme. There was a danger of stumbling into a crisis. Adams stated that he was not in a position to discuss actual decommissioning or a timetable for decommissioning. The appointment of Martin McGuinness to talk to De Chastelain was a significant move which has not been given adequate recognition by Unionists. There was no requirement under the Agreement for any such appointment to be made. Sinn Fein's stance on decommissioning is fully compatible with the Agreement. The wording of the

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Agreement was in any case deliberately ambiguous.

**"Steps" paper**

Ambassador Barrington asked Adams whether the scenario envisaged in the Government's "steps" paper was "in the ballpark" for Sinn Fein.

Adams responded cautiously. The paper was not in the ballpark "at the moment", "among other reasons because we don't know if it's in David Trimble's ballpark". Adams accepted that an informal group drawing together representatives of the parties could play a useful interim role in relation to the preparations for the North-South Council. He recognised that preparatory work needs to be done in advance of the coming into force of the institutional arrangements envisaged in the Agreement.

**Trimble's intentions**

Adams mentioned that he was to have a further meeting with Trimble. His assessment of Trimble was relatively positive. According to Adams Trimble was reluctantly persuaded by Blair to accept the Good Friday deal, "woke up the following morning regretting what he had done", but is now by and large - despite sometimes confusing the roles of UUP leader and First Minister - eager to make the Agreement work.

According to Adams, Unionism is divided at present into two camps: those who "don't want Fenians around the place", and those who accept the Agreement. But in the second camp there is still a tendency to haggle over the details, and there are those who want to retain a sense of psychological superiority. In Adams's view the decommissioning issues is largely driven by that sense of superiority - which could be compared to that of a planning authority which finally allows you to build a house but imposes gratuitous conditions just to show who is master. We discussed with Adams whether Unionist opinion in general would tolerate a more flexible position on decommissioning than the UUP has adopted. Adams was strongly of this view. He argued that trust will deepen mainly through the operation of the new institutions, as Sinn Fein is seen to act in a responsible way.

Adams commented on the sparsity of Sinn Fein's contacts with Unionists regarding the current impasse, despite a normal working relationship within

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certain bodies in the Shadow Assembly. If there is a crisis, why make it so difficult for the relevant people to "sit around the table"?

**Mowlam and Blair**

Adams volunteered to brief the Ambassador on the outcome of his meeting with the Prime Minister on Wednesday morning (this briefing subsequently took place over the telephone).

In the course of conversation, it became clear that Adams was convinced of Mowlam's grasp of the decommissioning issue, and of the need to find a way out as a matter of urgency. He was more nervous, in the light of speeches made during the referendum campaign, of Blair's personal opinions in the matter.

**Remarks by Alex Maskey**

At dinner the same evening, Alex Maskey told the Ambassador he was worried about a possible delay in implementing the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement and at the impact of such a delay on the Republican movement. Maskey said he was "not talking about the Real IRA or the Continuity IRA".

Yours sincerely,

Philip McDonagh

Philip McDonagh
Counsellor

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