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Meeting with Secretary of State

Dublin, 29 October

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1. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State had a meeting with the Secretary of State in Iveagh House yesterday afternoon. They were accompanied by Secretary Gallagher, Tim O'Connor and the undersigned. The Secretary of State was accompanied by Bill Jeffrey, Peter Bell, Nigel Warner and Ambassador Sutherland.

2. The Minister welcomed the British delegation. The Secretary of State raised at the outset concerns on the part of the Home Secretary about plans by the Minister for Justice for the release of a prisoner (O'Dwyer) who was only recently transferred to our jurisdiction from Britain. The Home Secretary had expressed unhappiness about this at a Cabinet meeting earlier in the day. However, he and No 10 had agreed that it did not merit a major row with the Irish Government. The British trusted that this case would not be used as a precedent for other releases ahead of the schedule settled for Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State suggested that some "bridge-building" might be undertaken with the Home Office in order to prevent any difficulties arising for future releases of importance to Sinn Féin. She did not wish this matter to receive media attention.

3. Gallagher noted that the Minister for Justice and the Home Secretary would be meeting in Vienna tomorrow and that direct contacts on this subject were already in hand between their officials. The Minister undertook to relay the Secretary of State's concerns to the Minister for Justice.

4. Turning to the work underway in relation to the implementation bodies, the Minister noted the suggestion that a meeting with the Irish Government at political level might take place in Belfast next Monday, on the assumption of sufficient progress being made at today's round-table meeting between the parties. He referred also to our contacts with the parties, to the memorandum which the Taoiseach and he had brought to Government recently (which had reflected helpful cooperation with the NI Departments) and to the healthy state of preparations at official level. A lot of work remained to be done, however. The Government wanted to see strong and

meaningful implementation bodies (in the areas of e.g. tourism, trade or transport planning). These would bolster nationalist confidence and might perhaps help to ease difficulties over decommissioning.

5. The Minister also recalled the key points he and the Minister of State had made to Paul Murphy last week regarding amendments which we would wish to see to the Northern Ireland Bill and on which the British side had undertaken to reflect. Jeffrey confirmed that Paul Murphy had yet to reach a final view on a number of issues and was still considering the points we had made.
6. The Secretary of State hoped that it would be possible to achieve meaningful bodies. If sufficient progress were made at today's meeting, a meeting next Monday at which the Irish Government would give its imprimatur would be very valuable. However, the outcome from today might not be as clearcut as we might like.
7. The Minister of State asked what number of Departments was likely to be agreed. The Secretary of State noted that six would not be attractive to the SDLP or Sinn Féin. Gallagher suggested that, as they would be the beneficiaries of a tenth portfolio, the SDLP would not agree to less than ten. O'Connor said that, according to a readout we had received on the session this morning, there had been a constructive tone and common ground had been identified on a number of points, including the need for the office of the First and Deputy First Ministers to have a significant role, the need for junior Ministers and agreement on a number of eight substantive areas. As of now, however, the UUP were not committing themselves to a total number of Departments.
8. Gallagher mentioned the pressure being applied by our Government to Sinn Féin to take a constructive approach to these negotiations. The Secretary of State said that, at their meeting earlier in the week, Adams had complained that the UUP were engaged in blocking tactics but had indicated that Sinn Féin would participate constructively.
9. Jeffrey suggested that Trimble would hold off agreeing to ten Departments for as long as necessary. Both sides agreed that a distribution which would involve, say, ten Ministers but only seven Departments would be unworkable. There was a brief discussion of possible outcomes in relation to junior Ministers.

10. On the areas for implementation bodies, the Minister, again emphasising the need for strong bodies in the economic areas, said that our thinking and preferences would lie in the following areas:

Tourism
 Trade promotion / business development
 EU programmes
 Training and employment
 Strategic transport planning
 Arts, culture and Irish language
 Inland waterways and Inland fisheries

He also indicated the areas we envisaged for separate implementation. Gallagher mentioned the SDLP's determination to get bodies covering strong economic areas such as (i) tourism, (ii) EU programmes and (iii) business development including inward investment in some form (with, for example, the IDA and the IDB having common offices abroad even though different incentive packages might be on offer).

11. The Secretary of State noted that Trimble had mischievously suggested that Mallon did not favour an Irish language body. In fact, Mallon wanted to subsume the Irish language within a wider arts/culture body, taking the view that something focussed on the Irish language only would be a waste of one of the six bodies
12. There was some discussion of the arrangements needed for contact between the Governments in the light of the various possible outcomes to today's meeting. The question of whether next Monday's meeting should be proceeded with would be judged in the light of what happened today. It was accepted that a number of meetings would probably be required between the parties and that there could be a lengthy process of "political horse-trading".
13. The Secretary of State indicated a readiness to give Trimble, Mallon and the parties some space for this purpose but remarked that "we need closure" at some point. Donoghue observed that, short of a very good outcome today which would facilitate a meaningful meeting next Monday, it might well turn out that officials would spend the remainder of next week developing options in detail while the Assembly members were on their visit to Brussels. O'Connor mentioned that the issue of who would

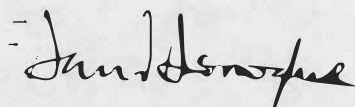
represent the Northern side at the Monday meeting had arisen; Trimble was apparently taking the view that only he and Mallon should attend. Gallagher emphasised that an inclusive approach was essential, otherwise Sinn Féin would, understandably, be very seriously alienated.

14. The Minister of State underlined the importance of the 31 October deadline. Agreeing, Gallagher said that, if the Governments felt that matters were being dragged out unduly by Trimble beyond that date, they would have to apply pressure to him. The Secretary of State agreed and suggested that a fortnight might be allowed for these decisions.
15. The Secretary of State then raised the impasse over decommissioning. The Minister saw no likelihood of Sinn Féin giving way on this issue in the near future. Gallagher said we needed to know from Sinn Féin the precise circumstances in which they believed they could use their influence effectively with the IRA. The Secretary of State accepted that Sinn Féin would not move under pressure but that spontaneous movement on their part would have to be "pre-cooked" to some extent. Questions would have to be put to them and options explored. It would be necessary to "let things breathe" for a while, however. The Minister said that this would be our position also. It was agreed that pressure should be maintained in private, on all parties, but that public pressure should be avoided.
16. The Secretary of State wondered whether e.g. an early announcement of the appointment of the Human Rights Commission would help to create a positive context. It would be helpful if a public indication could be given before Christmas that all the institutions signalled by the Agreement were either functioning or underway.
17. On the normalisation issue, Donoghue made positive reference to this week's Whiterock announcement and asked about future initiatives of this kind. The Secretary of State emphasised the difficulties she faced for as long as there was no decommissioning to balance British Government movement on normalisation and prisoners. She referred to the security strategy statement which she intended to publish soon.

18. She went on to indicate that she would shortly have to move on the question of recognising the validity of the LVF ceasefire, on which she was coming under increasing pressure. While IRA punishment beatings had resumed since the summer, the LVF were maintaining their ceasefire strictly and she feared a judicial review if she appeared to be treating the LVF unfairly. Jeffrey mentioned her political difficulties if people were to claim that she was holding back on the LVF in order not to embarrass Sinn Féin.

19. Under other business, the Minister handed over a note asking the Secretary of State to decide in favour of a gas interconnector in Northern Ireland in order to protect the interests of the Coolkeragh power station project (in which there is ESB involvement and which will have significant benefits for the North-West). The Secretary of State said that she had also had representations on this from John Hume and Martin McGuinness but that it came down to money ultimately. Recalling opposition from the parties to the privatisation of Belfast Harbour (the money for which might have been used for this project), she said nevertheless that "if I can find the money, I will". It was agreed that the matter would be pursued through the Secretariat.

20. In conclusion, there was some discussion of the line to be taken with the media afterwards. The Secretary of State said that she would emphasise the efforts being made by the Governments, and the momentum which had been restored by the current round of meetings, but that she would recall that the Good Friday Agreement itself had missed a deadline by a couple of days and that this had not caused any difficulty.



David Donoghue

30 October 1998