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PSM: PSMS: PSSG:
Messrs. Murray, Teahon,
Mansergh & Dalton:
Ambassadors London &
Washington: Joint Secretary:
Counsellors A-I

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Min & Teahon also
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ConfidentialMeeting with Sinn Féin20 February 1998

The two Governments met a Sinn Féin delegation at Castle Buildings this afternoon for the purpose of handing over the determination.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs was accompanied by Secretary Teahon, Secretary Gallagher and the undersigned. The Secretary of State was accompanied by Minister Murphy, Quentin Thomas and David Hill. The Sinn Féin delegation consisted of Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, Gerry Kelly, Francie Molloy, Dodie McGuinness, Siobhan O'Hanlon and Gearoid OhEara.

The meeting, the tone of which was sombre but cordial, lasted for fifteen minutes. After some initial civilities, the Secretary of State thanked Sinn Féin for coming. Emphasising the degree of care and consideration which the Governments had put into their conclusions, she handed over copies of the determination.

Adams asked whether there was an executive summary of it. The Minister directed his attention to para 22. Copies of the press statement were also circulated.

Adams noted that a BBC cefax report over lunchtime had carried a reference to Sinn Féin being brought back into the Talks on 9 March. He recalled that he had asked that the media should not be briefed on the Governments' determination before Sinn Féin had received it. The Secretary of State said that this had not been her desired outcome. Gallagher noted that there had also been media reports citing a 10 March return.

Adams said that the Governments were aware of Sinn Féin's views in the matter. They considered their expulsion to be totally unjust in the context of natural justice, the Governments' own rules and the search for a democratic peace settlement. The British Government had had every opportunity over the past few days to substantiate the allegations made and this had not happened. Adams regretted that this was so. He wished to request the Irish Government for a meeting with the Taoiseach, and the British Government for a meeting with the Prime Minister, as soon as possible. He would be repeating these requests publicly.

The Minister said that his request to the Irish Government would be taken on board. It was the Taoiseach's intention, and his own that the Government would keep in touch with Sinn Féin at political and official levels during their absence from the Talks. A meeting with the Taoiseach should cause no problem.

Adams says that Sinn Féin would take the determination away and study it. It was proper, however, that they would talk to the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister about it.

The Minister repeated that he did not anticipate any problem in relation to a meeting with the Taoiseach. He regretted the state of affairs necessitated by the outcome of the determination. On his own behalf, and on the Government's behalf, he expressed his appreciation for the role which Adams, McGuinness and others had played in the peace process. The Governments had made clear that they saw the end game coming within the next six weeks. The Irish Government hoped that Sinn Féin would be back in the Talks on the due date and they looked forward to that.

Adams expressed his appreciation for the Minister's remarks. He commented that the determination had reduced to disenfranchised status the 175,000 people who had voted for Sinn Féin on the island of Ireland. There was, however, no point in prolonging the discussion. The Governments had made the determination and Sinn Féin were looking for meetings with the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister. He suggested that matters might be left at that for now.

The Secretary of State agreed with the Minister that it was a sad day which nobody had wanted. The Governments had made clear, however, that they would keep political and official channels open. The British Government had encouraged Adam's visit to the US next week. While it would be up to the Administration to decide who would see him, the British Government did not wish in any way to create problems for him. She indicated that she and the Minister would circulate the determination to the media and answer a few questions.

Adams commented that, although the Talks process had its deficiencies, Sinn Féin had had the feeling that the two Governments were making a particular effort to make it succeed. As for keeping channels open, he made clear that Sinn Féin were not interested in low-key contacts of the kind granted to the UDP (with whom Paul Murphy had communicated recently via a video link). They represented a proud and dignified people. They would go out and manage the problem now created as best they could. In this context, Adams complained about a very heavy Army build-up in recent days. He mentioned, as an example, a heavy Army presence in the Short Strand area which they had noticed en route to Castle Buildings. This was provocative and unnecessary.

Adams emphasised the responsibility of the British Government in ensuring that things were not made more difficult through an oppressive Army presence in Nationalist areas. Many young people, he remarked, had no real interest in the peace process. The British Government had a job to do in managing its security forces.

He thanked the two Governments for presenting the determination to Sinn Féin in a face-to-face meeting, which they considered more dignified.

The Secretary of State said that everything possible would be done to keep dignified procedures going over the coming weeks. She recognised that Sinn Féin did not want to be treated in a patronising way. It would help if they would indicate any concerns they had through the usual channels.

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Adams replied brusquely that "there aren't any" and repeated this when the Secretary of State wondered about Siobhan O'Hanlon in this connection. As Sinn Féin leader and an MP, he wanted a meeting with the Prime Minister.

McGuinness described the Governments' decision as a devastating blow against Sinn Féin's peace strategy. It would not, however, change their approach in any way.

With thanks being expressed all round, the meeting then concluded.

David Donoghue
20 February 1998

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT**20 February 1998**

The two Governments have together now reached our joint decision. After the most careful examination of all of the material available to us, we have been obliged to conclude that the representations under Rule 29 are upheld and that Sinn Féin should not be allowed to participate in the Talks.

We have just met Sinn Féin to convey our decision personally to them. It is being made available to all the other participants in the Talks and is being published.

Great care has been taken by the Governments in arriving at their conclusions. Against the background of the three-day session of the talks in Dublin Castle this week, which allowed all parties, including Sinn Féin, the opportunity to state their views in full, the Governments wished to ensure that the fullest possible consideration was given to those views and to all the issues and factors involved.

There is little time left now until May. Both Governments are determined to work with the parties to produce a settlement over the coming six weeks. We want as many parties as possible - including Sinn Féin - to have the opportunity to contribute during this critical period.

Subject crucially to events on the ground and to convincing demonstration in word and deed that a complete, unqualified and unequivocal IRA ceasefire is being fully and continuously observed, it is the expectation of both Governments that Sinn Féin will be able to return to the talks on 9 March. We will maintain contacts with Sinn Féin in the meantime.

In the case of the UDP, and now in the case of Sinn Féin, the Governments have being prepared, in the interests of inclusivity and rapid progress in the Talks, to envisage a return to the Talks at an early stage. However, this approach could certainly not be maintained in the event of further violence by the organisations linked to these parties. The credibility of the process could not withstand such a further challenge. All parties should have no doubt about the two Governments' resolve in such circumstances.

In view of the nature of the proceedings under which the Governments have made their determination on the case of Sinn Féin, they do not propose to comment further on its detail or outcome.