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Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

11 May, 1998

Mr. Seán Ó hUiginn
Ambassador of Ireland to the U.S.A.
Washington D.C.

Dear Seán,

The Agreement concluded on Good Friday in Belfast by the two Governments and the full spectrum of parties involved in the multi-party negotiations is truly historic. After more than a generation of conflict, we now have an agreed and widely supported framework - something for which successive Irish Governments and a generation of dedicated officials have worked for so long.

An historic achievement of this nature would not have been possible without a range of key ingredients. You know, better than most, what these were. In regard to a number of them, we were blessed with good luck over the past year.

But during that year and over a much longer period, it was vitally important that successive Taoisigh, Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Governments were able to rely on the remarkable breadth of knowledge, creative talents and dedicated professionalism of a fine corps of officials dealing with Northern Ireland.

I fully recognise, and want to put on record, the often unsung but enormous and vital contribution of the civil servants, who have worked for years behind the scenes, painstakingly ensuring that all of the necessary ingredients for the Agreements now reached, were in place. Without such back-up this agreement would not have been possible. I was very pleased that in the many tributes paid recently in both Houses of the Oireachtas, a lot of the speakers singled out the civil servants involved for particular recognition.

You yourself made an enormous contribution over the whole period involved, back to the talks in 1990/91 and even earlier, then in the period of the Hume-Adams

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exchanges and leading up to the first IRA ceasefire; then, pre-eminently, in negotiating the Joint Framework Document; then, subsequently in getting over the Washington 3 hurdle and getting the multi-party negotiations started; then in persuading the Republican movement to restore the ceasefire; then in preparing the way for Sinn Féin entry into the talks; but above all perhaps, through a combination of steely resolve and negotiating skill, in avoiding the breakdown of the negotiations on the numerous occasions when this could so easily have happened. Your indomitable approach prevented the talks going down numerous cul-de-sacs, related to decommissioning, from which they would never have escaped. The leadership you gave, at official level, to the Irish Governments negotiating team and to our team in the Liaison Group with British officials was absolutely crucial in ensuring that when I and Prime Minister Blair came to office, we had ready to hands a talks vehicle that had avoided encumbrances which would have been fatal to the enterprise. I am also conscious that there were many times when you had to take the main weight and heavy responsibility in leading the Irish team at Castle Buildings.


Of course, the entire negotiations had the Joint Framework Document as the main point of reference for the Irish Government and its delegation. That document will always stand as a testimony to your superb drafting and negotiating skills. In the final Agreements, not every aspect of the JFD is reflected but the scheme and structure of the Agreements is recognisably that of the Framework Document and whole swathes of language reflect the formulations in whose creation you were so centrally involved.

After all your efforts, it was, I could imagine, a little disappointing for you that you could not be there, physically, when the Agreements were concluded. But in your role as Ambassador in Washington, you continued to play a very important and most constructive role and it was therefore fitting that you were very much involved, at the end, in the contacts involving President Clinton and the White House, which were so vital to ensuring that we secured an agreement with widespread cross-community support.

I was very fortunate that, when I took office, I had somebody of your calibre available as one of the small group of key advisers, whose creativity and credibility were key to

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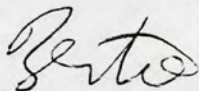
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breaking the icepack and breaking into the warmer waters that brought us, eventually, to where we now are.

Few public servants have played a role in the advancement of the welfare of their country and of its people that can compare with your remarkable contribution. You can be deservedly proud of all you have done. On my own behalf, and on behalf of the Government, I want to express our deepest appreciation.

With warm wishes.

Yours sincerely,



Bertie Ahern
Taoiseach.