

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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24 November 1997 No of pages including this one: 7

To: HQ
For: Second Secretary

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Visits by the President to Northern Ireland.

1. The British side have raised with us the question of advance notification in relation to visits made by President McAleese to Northern Ireland.

2. They presume that the frequency of such visits will be markedly higher than those of her predecessor and they hope to achieve certain understandings with us in this respect from the outset. They are clearly anxious to reassure Unionists that, despite the special circumstances of the McAleese Presidency, the appropriate formalities will continue to be observed.

3. As you are aware, arrangements were agreed between the two Governments in 1993 in relation to advance notification of visits by either the President or the Taoiseach. A copy of the agreed note is attached. In practice, it has rarely been possible to adhere to the strict letter of these arrangements. Advance notification of a fortnight or so has been closer to the norm and in one or two instances it has been a matter of days (occasioning some criticism on the British side).

4. David Watkins of the Central Secretariat has been pressing for a distinction to be drawn, in the circumstances which arise with the election of President McAleese, between Presidential visits which are strictly private and those which are undertaken in either a fully or partly official capacity. He envisages that the agreed notification procedures would apply if a visit is either fully, or partly, official. The attached note from the British side reflects this approach.

5. In discussions here, we have been emphasising that it is too early to determine how frequently the President may wish to travel to Northern Ireland or the likely content of

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her visits. Furthermore, the segregation of a visit into private and official aspects cannot be an exact science, as the British note itself acknowledges. The suggestion that the agreed procedure would be triggered if a visit contains "one element in a Presidential capacity" seems to us to be unworkable, as there would be inevitable differences of opinion over what constitutes such an element.

6. We have been suggesting instead that a flexible approach is needed, at least until such time as a pattern develops in relation to Presidential visits. Our concern is to avoid a rigid procedure of the kind proposed by the British, which, on a strict interpretation, could lead to virtually all visits being subject to advance notification of several weeks.

7. It is possible that there may be differences of opinion within the British side as to which visits should be treated as private. We mentioned today the possibility of a visit by the President on 5 December to Newry for a reception by the Newry and Mourne District Council and to Belfast for a dinner at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies. We heard subsequently that Valerie Steele, the Central Secretariat official who regularly deals with Presidential visits (in cooperation with John Kennedy of D/Taoiseach), is inclined to the view that this would be a private visit. This is a sensible view, and one which we will be encouraging, but it is unlikely to be fully shared on the British side (because of the Newry and Mourne dimension).

8. We would be grateful if these papers could be copied to D/Taoiseach and if we could be kept briefed in relation to the planning of the 5 December visit.

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NOTE TO THE IRISH SIDE

IRISH PRESIDENTIAL VISITS TO NORTHERN IRELAND

To-day's Delegation Meeting at Maryfield referred to the procedural arrangements which provide for the British Side to be notified in advance of visits to Northern Ireland by the Irish President. A copy of these agreed arrangements is attached.

2. The view was shared that the present procedural arrangements for handling visits should continue to apply to visits by President Mary McAleese; certainly the British Side are anxious not to disturb these, if at all possible. It is evident, however, that President McAleese will be not only visiting Northern Ireland in her Presidential capacity but be present for personal or domestic reasons. Accordingly the British Side propose that:

a. where President McAleese is in NI solely in a **personal capacity**, the only necessary liaison arrangements needed are between the two police forces.

b. when the President visits in her **capacity as President,** the already agreed procedural arrangements should be adhered to, not only for the purposes of liaison between the two police forces but also to ensure that the necessary proprieties apply, and courtesies are extended.

c on those occasions which are **partly or even primarily in a personal capacity, but with one element of her presence in a Presidential capacity**, the present procedural arrangements should also be invoked.

3. It is recognised that even when Professor McAleese is in NI in a purely personal capacity, there will be times when she will be greeted in parts of the community as the President, and as if she were on a visit in her official capacity. This is a simple consequence of there being an Irish President who

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comes from, remains resident in, and has contacts throughout NI. It does, however, underline the need for rational arrangements agreed by both Governments and the need to be able to distinguish clearly between those occasions when President McAleese visits in a Presidential capacity as against being in NI for private reasons, and for clarity in arrangements.

4. The British Side stand ready to discuss arrangements if this would be at all helpful.

Signed:

J R FISHER

13 November 1997

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ARRANGEMENTS FOR VISITS BY THE PRESIDENT AND TAOISEACH TO NORTHERN IRELAND.

1. Central Secretariat is responsible within the NIO for coordinating all VIP and VVIP visits to Northern Ireland, for arranging transport, accommodation, security and publicity and for making the necessary protocol arrangements.

2. The following suggested arrangements reflect the steps which the Central Secretariat follows in respect to all VVIP visits to Northern Ireland. The planning process is rigorous in recognition of the prestigious standing of such visitors.

Advance Notification

3. It would be helpful if the British Embassy could be notified as soon as the President or Taoiseach plans to accept an invitation to Northern Ireland, and especially helpful if such notification could be given before a formal aceptance was sent. Central Secretariat could then advise through the Embassy in particular on whether there were any difficulties with the date or locations to be visited.

4. For practical purposes, Central Secretariat would in respect of a routine visit be grateful for minimum advance notice of four weeks.

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Programme

5. A draft outline programme together with the names and telephone numbers of the contact at each venue should then be forwarded to Central Secretariat through the AI Secretariat together with the names and home addresses of any other guests being invited. Again, for practical purposes three weeks' advance notification would be helpful.

6. Central Secretariat would then plan for a meeting with representatives from the Office of the Taoiseach, the RUC and the NI Government Information Service to discuss arrangements and to "recce" each location to be visited and meet the organisers. We should aim for such "recces" to be completed not less than two weeks in advance of the visit.

7. A final programme and timings could then be confirmed by the Irish Government following the "recce" and forwarded to the AI Secretariat. Five working days' notice before the visit would be helpful.

Role of Central Secretariat

8. Central Secretariat will notify the appropriate Lord-Lieutenant for arrival and departure, in the case of the President, and inform the relevant Mayor or Chairman of the District Council in each area to be visited as well as the local MP.

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9. A representative of Central Secretariat and the NI Information Service will be present at each location to be visited together with the RUC.

Other

10. The above procedures are for planned visits; in urgent and unusual circumstances (eg a funeral or memorial service) arrangements would need to be made more speedily. For security reasons, it is important that the organisers at each event should be advised not to publiise the name of the Chief Guest in advance, and that the name does not appear on invitations or programmes.

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