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DESK IMMEDIATE

FROM: D J R HILL
Talks Secretariat
2 July 1991

cc: PS/PMG (B&L) - B
PS/MofS (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Pilling - B
Mr Ledlie - B
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Wood - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mr D A Hill - B
Mr Petch - B
Mr Archer, RID - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Appleyard (copy via SIL)-B
Mr Brooker
Mr Margetts - B

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B

TALKS: SIGNING OFF

I attach for consideration:

- (a) a draft statement; and
- (b) a draft covering minute to the PM.

signed

D J R HILL
Talks Secretariat

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DRAFT STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE

[Hon Members will be aware, Mr Speaker, that the political talks which have taken place, in the period since 26 April, at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, have been brought to a conclusion.] I should like to take this opportunity to explain to the House the background to this decision, to describe what occurred during those talks and to set out the Government's hopes for the future.

2. Hon Members will recall that my statement to the House on 26 March was generally accepted as a basis for political talks which would address, as part of the same process, relationships within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; among the people of the island of Ireland; and between the two Governments. I announced that talks would take place in three strands corresponding to those three main sets of relationships. I also said that to allow an opportunity for the wider political dialogue which the four main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland and the two Governments envisaged, the two Governments had agreed not to hold a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference between two pre-specified dates. Those dates were subsequently specified as being 26 April - the date of the last Anglo-Irish Conference - and 16 July. This interval, allowing some time at either end for the Anglo-Irish Secretariat to complete the business of servicing one Conference and to make preparations to service the next, provided ten clear weeks for substantive political exchanges.

3. It became clear earlier this week that the process as a whole would not be completed before the end of this interval and that there was little prospect of making further progress towards specific proposals. After consultation with the leaders of the parties represented at the talks I decided that the talks should therefore be brought to conclusion. We must now, Mr Speaker, take stock of what has been achieved during the talks and of the prospects which now exist for securing constructive political development in relation to Northern Ireland.

4. As the House knows, it did not prove possible to move as rapidly as I had hoped to plenary sessions of the first strand of the

talks. A range of procedural issues with significant implications for all the participants in the talks were aired and solutions had to be sought in a series of bilateral exchanges with those affected which eventually succeeded in determining the venues for meetings in the second strand of the talks, arrangements for chairing that strand of discussion, the identity of the Chairman and the procedural guidelines which would be observed.

5. As I reported to the House on 13 June, the leaders of the political parties represented at the talks agreed on 5 June that plenary sessions would start on 17 June and this duly happened. After an opening statement from me the parties presented their initial position papers, following which there was a process of clarification to ensure that other delegates had understood those initial positions. Subsequently, during a more intensive schedule of meetings, there was a valuable exchange of views around a series of common themes which had emerged from the initial presentations.

6. Mr Speaker, the commitment and seriousness of purpose shown by all the parties in their bilateral exchanges with me and in the plenary sessions is a source of great encouragement for the future. I am also pleased to be able to report that the plenary sessions provided the forum for some significant and constructive exchanges between the parties on a range of fundamental issues. This reinforced my view and, I believe, the views of others around the table that the reasons which lead the Government and others to persist in efforts to reach the agreement incorporated in the 26 March statement were and remain valid. It confirms the judgement of all those involved in the talks process that the time is ripe for political talks in relation to Northern Ireland which would address all the relevant relationships; that the process is of value and has potentially even greater value; that a degree of common ground exists; and that there is a good prospect that a comprehensive political accommodation could be reached.

7. Mr Speaker, I therefore hope that it may prove possible in due course to have further exchanges with the parties and with the Irish Government to explore, initially on a bilateral basis, the possibility of finding terms on which fresh discussions could be held.

DRAFT MINUTE TO THE PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND: POLITICAL TALKS

As I warned at Cabinet last week, it has proved necessary to bring the political talks on which I have been engaged to a conclusion.

2. In the face of the two Governments' determination to stand by the agreement to hold a Conference on 16 July, the Unionists have refused to shift from their position that the next Conference would mark the end of the talks process. Given the impossibility of completing the talks in the remaining few days and in the absence of any indication that they will resume at a later date, the SDLP is, naturally enough, not willing to reveal any more of its negotiating hand in the current "internal" strand of discussions. There is therefore, in my judgment, no prospect of making further substantive progress and after consultation with the party leaders I have decided to bring the talks to a conclusion. This was announced in a brief agreed press statement, text attached.

3. The Government has I think gained credit with the parties for standing by its various commitments and also for recognising the reality of the situation and not falling into the temptation of trying to keep the talks going to the bitter end.

4. As it is, the general mood among the parties is positive. The plenary exchanges have produced some moments of genuine political dialogue. Mr Mallon of the SDLP has described them as "golden moments" and Dr Paisley told me that they were "the best conversations he has ever had" with nationalist representatives. Those delegates who are committed to dialogue will have been genuinely encouraged, as I have been, and confirmed in their view that a political accommodation may indeed - given considerably more work, continued commitment and more time - be within reach.

5. Although the Unionist leaders are adamant that there can be no resumption of this process they have indicated privately that they are content to engage in further exploration of the prospect for agreeing a basis for "fresh discussions". The other party leaders

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are also committed to finding a basis for fresh talks and the record of your conversation with Mr Haughey in Luxembourg confirms that the Irish Government will be of a like mind. Today's press statement ends on that note and I will begin the process of constructing such a basis for renewing dialogue as soon as practicable, probably after the Northern Ireland holiday period in mid-July. This may not be absolutely straightforward and in the event it may not be possible to engage in serious exchanges about fresh talks before early September. I will consider what should be said to Sir Ninian Stephen about all this. We are making sure that he will not be surprised by press reports.

6. There will clearly be a need for a statement to Parliament and I attach the text to the statement which I intend to make tomorrow afternoon.

7. I am sending copies of this letter to Douglas Hurd, Tom King, Kenneth Baker, Patrick Mayhew, John MacGregor and David Waddington, and to Sir Robin Butler.