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FROM: PS/Secretary of State
20 May 1991

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Minister of State (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Pilling - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr Pope, o/r - B

611/5
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Mr D J R Hill (B&L) - B

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH MR HUME: 15 MAY 1991

The Secretary of State saw Mr Hume at 11.40am on Wednesday 15 May. Dr Mawhinney and PUS were also present.

2. The Secretary of State began by informing Mr Hume that he had told the press yesterday that he had not received a definitive answer from the SDLP, in line with the agreement which he understood to have been reached between Mr Hume and Dr Mawhinney. Mr Hume said that that was correct. His formal answer was that he agreed with the proposition that the Secretary of State put forward the previous day, but he was concerned that events since the paper had been issued undermined the whole process.

3. The Secretary of State explained that he had spoken to all the party leaders before he had issued the paper, and had told them that the paper would address not only venue, but also the two questions which the Unionists had asked in respect of the chairmanship of Strand 2 and the ground-rules for Strand 3, and in particular the ability of the Unionists to make a contribution to that Strand. He had therefore consulted the Irish Government. When he had seen the Unionist leaders the previous day, and told them about the concept for an independent chairman, they had immediately said that this was an issue on which they would wish to raise with the Prime Minister. They had then been in touch with No. 10, who had contacted the Secretary of State to ask for his reaction. His

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reaction had been that the independent chairmanship was a proper subject for the Prime Minister to see the Unionist leaders, and that it would be sensible to see them promptly. There was, of course, no way in which the Prime Minister could have seen the leaders before 10.00 that day.

4. Mr Hume said that the Unionists were actually concerned with renegotiating the process. The 26 March document was all that was required. The Unionist leaders had gone over the Secretary of State's head. The process could not continue on the basis that the Unionists would ask to see the Prime Minister whenever a difficulty for them arose. He was also concerned about the adverse effect that events were having on the image of all politicians. The media kept referring to "the politicians" without distinction. He had fought the IRA for many years, and was now being undermined. The problem with the Unionists, as with the Provisionals, was that their leaders were the most extreme. His house had been attacked by the "Provos" 9 times, and Mr McGrady's had also been attacked. Nevertheless he had faced the IRA down. The more the current situation was allowed to continue, the more the political process would be undermined.

5. The Secretary of State said that the Unionists had agreed to respond to his proposition after their meeting with the Prime Minister. They would either accept it or not. If not, he would need to consult with the parties and the Irish Government to ask them whether the basis that emerged was an acceptable basis for carrying on. If it was not acceptable, "we stop". Mr Hume said that the Unionists would want a statement about the constitutional position and a revised statement in respect of the independent chairman. Everything was supposed to be on the table. He recognised that in practical terms there would be no change to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, but that did not preclude what was to be put on the table. He had thought that the Secretary of State had requested answers by 10.00am that morning. The Secretary of State said that the proposition for an independent

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chairman had been known to himself since lunch-time on Friday, but not to the Unionists until lunch-time on Tuesday. It was an appropriate subject on which to ask for clarification. That said, he would wish to make it clear that he would not be involved in "textual barter" at the meeting that afternoon. Mr Hume commented that the Unionists would be looking for a statement from the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister should say no more than refer to the 26 March statement and that he fully supported his Secretary of State. The Unionists were also after more bilateral meetings, which simply did not work as a way of making progress.

6. The Secretary of State apologised that it had taken so long to address this particular problem. But joint chairmanship had always been impractical. The question was whether it was better to stop and call it a day or to go on. Mr Hume commented that the process had been destroyed in the eyes of the public anyway. The Secretary of State responded that at an admittedly unrepresentative gathering of the Church of Ireland Synod last night, he had detected a spirit of good-will across the 32 counties in favour of the talks process.

7. Dr Mawhinney asked Mr Hume what he planned to say to the Press. Mr Hume responded enigmatically that he had no plans at all. As he left, he added that all the Unionists wanted was to exercise power. The process so far was an argument for the HMG rather than the Unionists doing everything, and doing it fairly.

8. The meeting ended just before noon.

Signed

A J D PAWSON
Private Secretary