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SEC 24014  
30 APR 1996  
C.C.R.U.

From: Mrs C J V Fenning  
Republic of Ireland Dept

Date: 23 April 1996

cc: PS/PUS  
(w/out Mr Figgis  
attachments) Mr Richards  
Ms Dean, Protocol Dept  
Ms Colvin, WED  
Ms Teare, News Dept  
Special Advisors  
Mr Watkins, NIO  
Belfast  
Mr Stephens, IPL NIO

UNDER/  
SEC 102614  
26 APR 1996  
CENT SEC

Mr Galsworthy  
PS

*Mr Conlan*  
*30.4*

**VISIT BY PRÉSIDENT ROBINSON: POSSIBLE SERVICE IN YORK MINSTER**

Problem

1. Irish suggestion of ecumenical (not famine-related) service at York Minster during President Robinson's official visit in June.

Recommendation

2. I recommend that Protocol Department explore formally the idea of an ecumenical service with the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities. The Northern Ireland Office and Protocol Department concur.

Background

3. President Robinson's Guest of Government visit to the UK from 4 - 7 June is expected to include a day outside London on 7 June. A suggestion from the Irish side is that she visit York including a visit to the Jorvik Centre (the Viking Museum) and an ecumenical service at York Minster. The day might also include some civic hospitality and sightseeing (Castle Howard is being considered).

4. Informal contacts between Protocol Department and the Dean of the Minster indicate that such a service would both be possible and welcomed on that date. But before making more formal approaches, including to Lambeth Palace and to the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, we would welcome confirmation that the Secretary of State has no objection to this element in the programme.

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Argument

5. In our view the inclusion of a religious element in President Robinson's programme would be entirely appropriate, given both the strong religious tradition in the Republic of Ireland and the links between the Churches of our two nations. In particular, it would recognise the importance of religious reconciliation between the Irish and British traditions in Northern Ireland. For similar reasons we have included the Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Hume on the draft guest list for the Prime Minister's lunch with President Robinson on 5 June.

A 6. The idea of an ecumenical service in York is not connected to an idea surfacing last year from HMA Dublin for the President to attend during her visit an ecumenical service of reconciliation, probably in Liverpool, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Irish Famine. This idea was considered within Whitehall (key papers attached) but was rejected: the Prime Minister (and others) expressed reservations, and in the changed circumstances after the South Quay bomb it was considered that it might raise more spectres than it laid to rest. Objections centred on the political minefield of a famine-related service: that attention would focus unconstructively on calls for a British apology.

7. An ecumenical service at York Minster would be an entirely different type of event. It would be highly unlikely to court controversy. York, unlike Liverpool, has only a small Irish population. The service, in a quintessentially British setting, would provide the opportunity for representatives of the two countries to unite in a solemn, contemplative, act of worship. It would be a powerful symbol of the constructive bonds between us, would add further gravitas to the visit - the first official visit to Britain by an Irish President, and would be warmly welcomed by the President herself.

Attendance

8. We would need to ensure high-level attendance on the British side. The Foreign Secretary is unavailable. As the event would be highlighting the need for reconciliation the week before negotiations begin in Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister might consider attending. Other suitable representatives could be: the Prince of Wales, Princess Royal (both probably unavailable), the Duke of York, Deputy Prime Minister, Northern Ireland Secretary, the Duke and Duchess of Kent or the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. The Dean of York is strongly in favour of the Duke of York, both because of his title and because he would balance likely local representation by army and air force.



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9. We would aim to fill the nave rather than just the choir: this would require a congregation of 800-1000. We will need to set arrangements in hand as soon as possible to achieve this number.

Cost

10. The basic costs of the service would be borne by the Churches concerned. Extra costs which could accrue to the FCO would probably be not more than £5000 (eg, orders of service, security, choir, overtime), and could be covered from Mr Richards' programme budget. Government Hospitality Fund would pay the costs of President Robinson and her official suite. Ministerial attendance would need to be funded by the relevant government department.

*Camilla Fenning*

Mrs C J V Fenning

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