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FROM: JULIE MAPSTONE
24 September 1997

cc: as attached

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKS SUMMARY 23 SEPTEMBER 1997

At the afternoon plenary, the Unionists shared the same conference room as Sinn Fein for the first time. The purpose of the plenary - the hearing of the UUP's indictment of Sinn Fein over the Mitchell principles - was something of a damp squib, particularly as the UUP's address on their indictment contained no evidence to support their allegations. Nevertheless a historic change had occurred.

In the early part of the day the report of a telephone conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr Trimble gave hope that the UUP were prepared to move into the three strands. Trimble gave the Prime Minister an assurance that if words on decommissioning from the two Governments' joint statement of 16 July were incorporated into the procedural motion, they would "nod it through". Various options incorporating this language were then discussed with the Irish, who were very concerned that further issues could still be raised by the UUP, in particular chairmanships. A problem still outstanding was Gary McMichael's concern that the principle of consent should be included in the procedural motion, an issue however which the SDLP said was substantive and therefore nothing to do with the opening plenary.

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There were worrying signs that the UUP's beleaguered position and increasing isolation were leading to a degree of paranoia, culminating in an extraordinary outburst from Ken Maginnis in a bilateral in which he accused the Secretary of State of personally acting deliberately to wreck the talks process, an assertion which he appeared quite genuinely to believe.

Some time was spent discussing with the Irish the handling of the next day, and the circulation to the parties of both the determination of the indictment of Sinn Fein, and the procedural motion, in preparation for an afternoon plenary. But despite the remaining unresolved issues on the procedural motion, the day ended with optimism that the opening plenary could at last be brought to a conclusion, thus permitting movement into substantive negotiations.

Signed

JULIE MAPSTONE

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HK/Talks