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**FROM: DAVID FERGUSON
CENTRAL SECRETARIAT
22 APRIL 1998**

cc: see attached list

PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

THE FORUM: VALEDICTORY MESSAGES

Issue: Response to letter from Forum Chairman asking for time for a planned and orderly conclusion to the Forum's work.

Timing: Overnight.

Recommendation: Letter overtaken by events. Take opportunity in response to thank Mr Gorman for his work. Write similarly to individual Forum members (as requested separately). Clear valedictory message for delivery by Lord Dubs during visit on Friday. Approve press release.

Letter from John Gorman: SOS 402/98

1. Mr John Gorman, Chairman of the Forum, has written to the Secretary of State about the Forum's dissolution and asking if it would be possible to bring the body to a planned and orderly conclusion.
2. Events have moved on considerably since the date of Mr Gorman's letter (10 April). Following the Talks participants' approval of the Agreement that day, arrangements were immediately put in place to dissolve the Forum, in accordance with provisions in the Entry into Negotiations Act.
3. Mr Gorman has since been made fully aware of the arrangements. He in turn passed on to fellow members last Friday (17 April) that 24 April was most likely to be the last day on which the Forum would meet. The Secretary of State's reply can therefore simply note this fact. However, she might also take the opportunity to formally thank Mr Gorman for his two years' work as

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Chairman of the Forum. (I understand she has already indicated separately a wish to do so.) A draft reply is at Annex A.

Letters of thanks to all participating Forum Members

4. I also understand that the Secretary of State wishes to thank, on an individual basis, all those members whose parties are currently participating in the Forum. Appropriate draft letters for this purpose are attached at Annex B.

Valedictory message

5. Lord Dubs had already agreed, coincidentally, to visit the Forum this Friday as part of the on-going series of Ministerial visits. In the circumstances, it might be appropriate if he were to say a few words on behalf of the Secretary of State at the beginning of the plenary session, expressing the Government's thanks for the work carried out by the Forum and its Chairman over the past two years. Lord Dubs' office has confirmed that he would be happy to do this, if the Secretary of State is content. And an appropriate draft is at Annex C for the Secretary of State's approval.

Press Release

7. The Secretary of State may also wish to consider issuing a press release to announce the dissolution of the Forum, drawing on Lord Dubs' comments and recording her thanks to the Chairman and the Chairmen of committees for their hard work and dedication over the past couple of years. A draft is attached at Annex D.

[signed. DGF]

DAVID FERGUSON
PB 28155

cc: PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)
PS/Lord Dubs (DANI, DOE & L)
PS/Mr Pilling (B&L)
PS/Mr Semple
Mr Thomas
Mr Steele
Mr Jeffrey
Mr Bell
Mr McCusker
Mr Watkins
Mr Carson
Mr Hill
Mr Maccabe
Mr Smyth

DRAFT

J R Gorman CVO CBE MC DL
Chairman
Northern Ireland Forum
3rd Floor
Interpoint
20-24 York Street
Belfast BT15 1AQ

Thank you for your letter of 10 April.

As you recognise, the Northern Ireland (Entry into Negotiations etc.) Act 1996 is quite prescriptive in terms of the action I am required to take if it appears to me that political negotiations are concluded or suspended. Since the parties participating in the Talks have now reached agreement I have therefore been obliged to take immediate action to dissolve the Forum. The appropriate Order is going through Parliament this week, with a view to Friday being the last day on which the Forum will meet. I understand that you were made aware of the position last week and that you have been taking steps to ensure that the Forum does come to a planned and orderly conclusion. I am pleased to hear that this has been possible.

You also asked whether it would be possible to arrange a final thank you to members. Since the date of your last plenary meeting has coincided conveniently with Alf Dubs' visit, I have asked him to speak on my behalf and to convey my thanks for the efforts of all your members for their contributions to the work of the Forum over the last two years.

This is also an appropriate time to place on the record my personal thanks for the important work you have undertaken as Chairman. You have displayed considerable skill in guiding discussion through some testing debate and for that you have both my thanks and appreciation. I have also greatly valued

the fair and reasonable manner with which you have discharged your duties
and for the role that you have played in managing the affairs of the Forum.

May I take this opportunity to wish you well for all that you do in the future.

MM

DRAFT

**LETTER TO EVERY MEMBER WHOSE PARTY IS CURRENTLY
PARTICIPATING IN THE FORUM**

I am writing to thank you for the contribution you have made to the work of the Forum during the past two years.

There have been wide-ranging debates across the full spectrum of economic and social activity in the Province and in other important areas; and a lot of hard and indeed valuable work has gone into supporting these debates with Committee reports drawing on as broad a set of specialist and other opinion as possible. My Ministerial colleagues and I have valued this work and we thank you for all the honest endeavour you have shown in seeking to influence public life in the Province.

I wish you well for the future.

MM

ANNEX C

LORD DUBS' SPEECH AT THE LAST MEETING OF THE FORUM

Thank you Mr Chairman

May I begin by thanking you and all members present, for the very kind invitation to come along and address the Forum today. Obviously we did not know when I accepted your kind invitation, that I would be attending what will be your last meeting. But I am particularly pleased to be here, since it gives me the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of the Secretary of State and of myself and my other Ministerial colleagues about the work you have undertaken in your plenary and your committee sessions.

The Forum has discharged its responsibility to discuss issues relevant to promoting dialogue and understanding between the communities in Northern Ireland with honest endeavour and your reports reflect the fact that you sought contributions from as wide a spectrum of opinion as possible.

I should like to place on the record our collective gratitude to you all for the valuable work you have undertaken in considering a wide range of issues important to all the people in Northern Ireland. In particular I should like to express our thanks to you Mr Chairman for the skill you have displayed over the past two years in guiding discussion through some testing debate and for the fair and reasonable manner in which you have discharged your duties. I should also like to recognise the efforts of your deputies, Gregory Campbell,

Ivan Davis, Sam Gardiner, Joan Parkes and Hugh Smyth and thank them for the contributions they made to the smooth running of business in your absence.

The Chairmen of your various Standing Committees, David Campbell, Oliver Gibson, Dermot Nesbitt and St Clair McAllister, Sean Neeson, Hugh Smyth and Bobby Stoker also deserve special mention for the considerable efforts they put into discharging their duties. The work these members have overseen has provided Ministers and Northern Ireland Departments with a fresh insight into many practical problems in the social, economic and political fields. They concentrated on the real issues - issues which matter to everyone, like health, the economy, education, agriculture and fisheries. The Forum's reports also acted as a valuable additional resource by supplying Government with further evidence from key players and professionals in the areas investigated.

We are most grateful to you for this. We also recognise the opportunities which have been provided by the Forum. Your debates in this Chamber allowed for wide-ranging exchange of views between parties pursuing common ground on numerous issues. This can only have led to a greater understanding of one another's views. It augurs well for the future. Of course, there have been heated exchanges on contentious issues but it is only in such debate that the real issues emerge and both the Secretary of State and the rest of the Ministerial team were pleased that this was not lost

on Forum members. If you are in the business of promoting dialogue and understanding, then it is clearly important that people can work together with respect and common courtesy.

And with that respect and courtesy, on behalf of the Secretary of State and the rest of the Ministerial team, I thank each and every one of you for the contributions you have made and offer you every good wish for the future.

MINISTER ATTENDS LAST MEETING OF FORUM

Attending the final meeting of the Forum today, Lord Dubs paid a warm tribute to the work of members on behalf of the Secretary of State. In his opening address, he said:

“I should like to place on record the Government’s collective gratitude to you all for the valuable work you have undertaken in considering a wide range of issues important to all the people of Northern Ireland”.

He continued:

“The Forum has concentrated on real issues - issues which matter to everyone, like health, the economy, education, agriculture and fisheries. The reports produced acted as a valuable additional resource by supplying Government with further evidence from key players and professional in those areas investigated”.

Lord Dubs offered particular thanks on behalf of the Secretary of State to the Chairman of the Forum, John Gorman, for the skill he had displayed over the past two years and for the fair and reasonable manner with which he had discharged his duties.

NOTE TO EDITORS

The Northern Ireland Forum was established by the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations) Act 1996. This Act contained a provision which required the Secretary of State to dissolve the Forum if political talks were concluded or suspended.

Sinn Fein campaigned on an abstentionist platform and therefore did not take their seats. The SDLP resigned their seats following their anger at the events surrounding the parade from Drumcree Church, Portadown in July 1996. The UKUP left following Sinn Fein's entry to the political talks in September 1997.