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From: PS/Secretary of State
4 September 1998

File

PS/Mr Murphy (DFP,B&L) - O
PS/Mr Ingram (DED,B&L) - O

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PORTADOWN INITIATIVE - PROGRESS REPORT

The Secretary of State has seen Mr Leach's submission of 3 September regarding efforts by officials to broker a lasting solution of the Drumcree parade, following up the process begun in the indirect contact talks in July involving No 10.

2. The Secretary of State would welcome confirmation that Mr Murphy and Mr Ingram are content with the way forward proposed. I should be grateful for early confirmation on your Ministers' views on this so that the draft letter to Mr Powell may issue as soon as possible.

CD Kyle

C D KYLE

PS/Secretary of State (L)

cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - O
PS/Mr Pilling (B&L) - O
PS/Mr Semple - O
Mr Watkins - O
Mr Jeffrey - O
Mr Bell - O
Mr Stephens - O
Mr McCusker - O
Mr Maccabe - O
Mr Priestly - O
Mr Clarke - O
Mr Gamble

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AN.MURPHY.LB

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Peter

Happy subject to deletion of []

DRUMCREE

Be

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Statement issued by Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition,
Portadown Orange District, the Government [and the independent
facilitators]

All sides acknowledge that there is a shared responsibility on everyone to build a climate of mutual respect and trust. Everyone must be committed to help create such a climate. All sides have agreed to continue discussions to seek to achieve that objective, which would involve a lasting resolution of the main issues in Portadown, including economic and social regeneration, community relations and parades.

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DRAFT

FROM: S J LEACH
ASSOCIATEDIRECTOR POLICI NGAND SECURITY
[] SEPTEMBER 1998

cc: See Distribution List

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

PORTADOWN INITIATIVE - LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

Summary

Issue: The purpose of this note is to update the Secretary of State with developments in the Portadown Initiative designed to permanently resolve the Drumcree problem. The Secretary of State is also invited to approve the attached letter which officials propose to send to Jonathan Powell. This letter not only provides news of developments but seeks clarification and approval of additional funds to be released to underpin an agreement on marches.

Timescale: It is important to move as quickly as possible to maintain momentum in the initiative. In particular the Orange Order still harbour ambitions to have a march along the Garvaghy Road this year and early movement is required to maintain this possibility. Approval from the Secretary of State before departing for the USA would be welcome.

Recommendation: That the Secretary of State approves the strategy and plan outlined in this minute and approves the attached letter to Jonathan Powell.

Discussion

Background

1. Following a set of meetings on 12 August (my note to Mr Watkins dated 13 August refers) some progress was made. In particular, there was some clear common ground. Thus both sides:

- declared their commitment to finding a permanent and lasting accommodation of the parades issue; and

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accepted that a civic forum, of which they shared a broadly similar conception, would be an essential element of the deal (the Orange were notably warmer towards this proposal than on previous occasions).

Furthermore they agreed with the suggestion that a brief public statement might be issued affirming the common determination of both sides to find a way forward and a lasting settlement. The aim would be to help reduce tensions in the community and each side agreed that such a statement would be valuable.

2. A statement was prepared and delivered to Dennis Watson and Brendan McKenna. Watson agreed the statement, but on 26 August, McKenna wrote rejecting the statement on two counts: that there was no indication that the Government was a party to the statement and that it focused on the parades issue only. He did however indicate that he would be prepared to look at new wording and that he believed that bi-lateral talks could continue in the absence of an agreed statement.

Strategy to move forward

3. Officials met together with the independent facilitators on 2 September to discuss how the matter could be best taken forward. At this meeting an outline strategy was agreed to move the matter forward as follows:

- (i) to agree a new statement with the participants;
- (ii) to re-start bi-laterals;

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- (iii) to put revised proposals re format of parades and the proposed Civic Forum to each side at the bi-laterals;
- (iv) if agreement can be reached on (iii), move on to discuss the timing of parades;
- (v) to hold a final set of talks prior to announcing an agreement.

Objectives

4. A revised statement has been drafted as at Annex A. This was discussed with Dennis Watson with myself and Roy Magee yesterday. He is broadly content with it, but before he puts it to the Portadown lodge, we propose to seek confirmation that it is acceptable to Brendan McKenna and the GRRC. A meeting has been arranged for tomorrow. Officials are optimistic that it should prove possible to agree a statement and for this to be issued as early as Friday (which should be a fairly quiet news day).

5. It should be possible to follow this fairly quickly with another round of bi-laterals. The purpose of these would be to discuss both the proposed Civic Forum, the Portadown initiative and to make further progress on the parades issue. In relation to the former, Mr McCusker has produced a draft outline paper at Annex B. This is an issue which will be of most interest to the residents. It would however be of considerable benefit and assistance to the overall discussions if some indications could be given of the level of financial assistance that might be available to underpin the initiative [Billy - can you expand - grateful for comments whether Annex B is necessary].

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Parades

6. On the parades issues, our aim in bi-laterals would be to reach agreement on firstly the format of future parades, including the numbers that may take part, bands and other relevant issues. The independent facilitators agree that discussion should centre on this area before any attempt is made to discuss issues of timing for future parades. Reaching a consensus on this issue would be a major step forward and should help facilitate discussion about when any future parades might start. There are a number of options available to put to the participants. One model may be to suggest a 3 year cycle with a full parade one year, a reduced parade the next and no parade in the year after that; or some variation of this. It will also be necessary, and quite difficult, to agree, when such a cycle may start; the Orange Order will press for a start this year, but residents are likely to hold out for any agreement being held over to 1999 at the earliest.

7. Officials believe discussions will not be easy. There is an anticipation that the residents in particular will adopt a hard line attitude, influenced by almost two months of protests directed at them by loyalists. Only last Saturday an incident occurred in Portadown town centre when a relative of Robert Hamill was assaulted. We remain optimistic however that agreement can be achieved especially as the prize flowing from the Portadown initiative is there to be won.

8. If it is possible to reach agreement, a final round of talks could be held, chaired by Jonathan Powell to finalise the matter which could also be used as a vehicle to launch a public announcement of what has been agreed.

9. In the Secretary of State's absence, officials will keep Mr Ingram and Mr Murphy informed of progress. The Secretary of State is therefore invited to:

- note developments to date;

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- agree the outline strategy proposed in this note;
- note the issues to be discussed in bi-laterals; and
- approve the attached letter to Jonathan Powell.

S J LEACH

SH ☎ 27012

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Statement issued by Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition, Portadown Orange District, the Government and the independent facilitators

All sides acknowledge that there is a shared responsibility on everyone to build a climate of mutual respect and trust. Everyone must be committed to help create such a climate. All sides have agreed to continue discussions to seek to achieve that objective, which would involve a lasting resolution of the main issues in Portadown, including economic and social regeneration, community relations and parades.

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ANNEX B

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ANNEX C

DRAFT LETTER TO:

Jonathan Powell
10 Downing Street
LONDON

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The purpose of this letter is twofold; to bring you up to date with the latest developments in talks with both sides involved in the Drumcree dispute, to outline our future strategy and to seek clarification on the specific issue of the level of financial assistance that may be available to underpin the proposed Portadown initiative.

Following meetings on 12 August some progress was made, particularly in identifying common ground and the objective of finding permanent and lasting accommodation of the parades issue. We had hoped this could be followed by a joint brief public statement to this effect from both sides. To date it has not been possible to find words to which both sides can sign up, but we are optimistic this can be shortly achieved.

Our intention is to follow an agreed statement with an early further round of bi-laterals. The objectives of these bi-laterals would be to take jointly forward the issues of the proposed Portadown Forum, the initiative and the format and timing of parades and to seek an agreement across all of the issues. In order to assist in their achievement draft documents on the Forum and initiative have been drawn up and we are working together with the independent facilitators to draw up possible models for future parades to put to both sides.

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There is a considerable degree of urgency in all this. The attitude of residents is hardening, influenced by almost two months of loyalist protests, the latest being on Saturday last in Portadown town centre. Those protests could escalate with the onset of autumn and the lengthening nights could provide an opportunity for more serious incidents to occur.

In this aspect it would greatly help discussions and be of considerable benefit in achieving a solution if we could begin to firm up the proposals on the additional financial resources that could be available to underpin the initiative - [Billy can you expand].

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