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Political Affairs Division
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John Spellar (B&L)

MEETING WITH THE LOYALIST COMMISSION – FRIDAY 10 OCTOBER 2003

Summary

Issue: Your meeting with the Loyalist Commission.

Timing: Meeting to take place at 3.00pm on Friday 10 October

Presentational Issues: The Commission may brief the media on the meeting. You will, as always, want to stress that this is an example of government's willingness to engage with political loyalism whilst also re-enforcing the message that violence and gangsterism will not be tolerated.

Recommendation: That you note the following briefing.

Detail

You have agreed to meet with a delegation from the Loyalist Commission on Friday 10 October. The Commission have advised that they see this as an introductory meeting at which you will have an opportunity to hear direct from them about the role of the Commission. They will, no doubt, also see it as the usual test of our commitment to dealing with political loyalism, as well as an opportunity for them to demonstrate to their own constituencies that they are arguing their case direct with government. The agenda reflects their desire to be seen as a mechanism for raising issues of concern at the grass roots. Attached at Annex A is a note setting out the origins and history of the Loyalist Commission, including Government's engagement with it.

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2. You have already met with the UPRG (which is represented on the Loyalist Commission) and are aware that we have been engaging for some time with the various strands of the loyalist community in an effort to address some of their genuine concerns, and to do what we can to encourage signs of a desire to develop a more progressive political strategy. Colleagues in OFM/DFM and DSD are currently working up a paper to put to Ministers which will seek to broaden out a whole range of issues in relation to our engagement with loyalism, and consider what shape our approach should take from here.

Key Messages

3. At this stage the key message remains one of broad encouragement endorsed with considerable health warnings:

- You will certainly want to **acknowledge and commend the efforts that have been made to develop a more positive and progressive political way forward** beyond the violence and intimidation that has often characterised the so-called "defence" of loyalist communities in the past.
- However, you will also want to **caution that recent events have shown very starkly that for many there is yet some considerable distance to travel**. You will want to give particular **emphasis to the fact that recent threats against, and intimidation of, Prison Officers have served only to further tarnish the image of loyalism** and you will want to **stress the need for political representatives of loyalism to do everything in their power to encourage calm within the prisons and to halt the intimidation and violent attacks on Prison Officers within the community**.
- You could **add that the recent attacks on schools and school children, not to mention the desecration of graves at Carnmoney cemetery, and the associated threat on Fr Dan Whyte's life, have done little to illustrate the positive developments we would like to be able to welcome on other fronts**.

Delegation

4. Rev Mervyn Gibson, the Commission's chair, is unable to attend this meeting as he is on holiday. It will be led instead by the Deputy Chair, Rev Barry Dodds who was, incidentally, one of the two former Prison Chaplains who assisted John Steele in his recent review of security at

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Maghaberry Prison. He, at least, should be very receptive of any message in relation to attacks on Prison Officers as he is very aware of the extent of our efforts to resolve the situation in Maghaberry. Rev Dodds has advised that tomorrow's delegation will also comprise:

Jim Wilson

Robert Williamson

Dennis Cunningham

William Cameron

Paul Hoey

Billy McGaughey

These names were only supplied to me at 5.00pm today. I will endeavour to provide further details in advance of tomorrow's meeting.

Agenda

5. I have been advised that the issues to be raised at tomorrow's meeting are likely to include the following (I am grateful to colleagues in relevant Divisions for providing briefing):

i. Threats to Protestant Community workers – what security packages are being offered? (See Annex B).

ii. Lack of Policing (Annex C).

iii. Substantial support needed for Restorative Justice style schemes (Annex D).

iv. 50/50 recruitment (Annex E).

v. New Monitoring Committee (Annex F).

vi. Funding Loyalist Communities (Annex G).

vii. Ceasefires (Annex H).

viii. Prisoner's welfare (Annex I).

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Tom Haire (CJPD) has suggested that it is possible the delegation will also raise the Reform of law on Rehabilitation of Offenders. Briefing on this is attached, as a contingency, at Annex J. As at the previous encounter with the UPRG, you will not want to get into detail on issues that fall outside your remit, or into the weeds of specific funding projects. If necessary, officials will be happy to deal with such issues subsequently.

Previous Ministerial meetings

6. The last Ministerial contact with the Commission was on 31 March this year when Des Browne met a delegation led by Rev Mervyn Gibson. This was a good-natured meeting which covered a range of issues, including a rehearsal of some of the issues on tomorrow's agenda, such as funding for community groups, ceasefires, prisoner welfare, policing, and threats to Protestant community workers. They also complained of a general lack of consultation with the unionist/loyalist community on political developments, and raised concerns about East-West bodies and OTRs. A full note of the meeting is attached at Annex K.

Contacts with the Irish

7. You will be aware that, as with the UPRG, the Loyalist Commission has had some significant engagement with the Irish. Indeed, at a meeting facilitated by Dr Robin Eames on 11 June, the Taoiseach had a discussion with eight members of the Commission on a range of issues, including the IMC (which the loyalists clearly saw as a form of Joint Authority by the back door). Reaction to the meeting was fairly low key, but the Irish saw it as an important step in their strategy to reach out to those within loyalism who are more politically-minded. The Irish, particularly as demonstrated by the recent efforts of Martin McAleese, are being very encouraging, both in word and (financial) deed, of loyalist efforts on the political front. They are keen for us to be equally enthusiastic. We continue to stress that we, too, are keen to support positive efforts, but always within the context set out at paragraph 3.

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