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**From: JOHN HOLMES**  
**Date: 22 January 1997**

**PRIME MINISTER**

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**NORTHERN IRELAND**

At the risk of trying your patience further on this unpromising subject, you may ... like to look at both the attached documents.

- (i) The first is the paper which Trimble handed over yesterday. While the specific proposals in the second half of the text have some constructive aspects which we may be able to pick up, the introductory section is alarming. As you will see, it is in effect a rejection of the present talks process, because of the possibility that Sinn Fein might join it. If published, this paper would cause the Irish and SDLP, and no doubt others, to lose all faith both in the UUP and in the talks.

*Not out. (1)*

It may be that this part of the paper is for internal consumption. Michael Ancram is meeting Trimble tomorrow, and will try to establish more clearly its status and whether it should be taken as a genuine expression of UUP views. He will also be pressing on the UUP the need for a move on decommissioning. If Trimble shows no readiness to compromise at all, it is not easy to see how the talks can continue for more than a few more days. We may then have to consider closing them down rapidly, despite the wishes of other parties, to stop the SDLP walking out and the process

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collapsing in a way which will make it impossible to pick up again after the Election.

- (ii) The second is the text of what the Taoiseach had to say in the Dail earlier today in response to questions from Ahern and others. It is very long but I have highlighted some of the nuggets. It is another excellent performance from Bruton: very firm about IRA terrorism; spelling out that Irish Government contacts with Sinn Fein are over for the moment; resisting all provocation by Ahern to criticise you or HMG; and generally taking a positive and statesmanlike line. As we have commented before, he is the best Taoiseach we are likely to get. I will take an opportunity to make clear to Teahon how well this performance went down here, if you agree.



JOHN HOLMES

Yes, please.  
On a note to Tony  
if you wish.

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draft, January 11th '97, revised 19th January '97, revised  
20th January 1997.

#### ANALYSIS

The Talks presided over by Senator Mitchell were created to provide a mechanism for the involvement of Sinn Fein/IRA in the political process.

Senator Mitchell in his report made the assumption that the IRA was genuinely committed to peaceful means (his report was signed in January 1996, before the breakdown of the cease-fire). Both HMG and the Dublin government were working on the assumption that violence would not return if Sinn Fein had access to the Talks, and designed the process accordingly.

Whatever one might say about these judgements, the current position is that SF/IRA is embarked upon a vicious and provocative campaign whose first objective is the full scale re-engagement of the Loyalist paramilitaries in terrorism.

In these circumstances, Ulster Unionists cannot allow themselves to be drawn into a process which provides for the arrival at the table of these provocateurs, as they clearly have no real commitment to promote their political objectives by exclusively peaceful means, and have comprehensively demonstrated their rejection of the principle of consent.

We note the views expressed by the Prime Minister before Christmas on the terms he might apply to the possible entry of SF/IRA, but would observe that things may change, the government may change, and more importantly there is no consensus between the parties on the circumstances under which SF should or could join.

In essence, UUP sees no prospect of or justification for SF involvement in the negotiations, while SDLP, Dublin and some others see them at the table immediately after a cease-fire, (even if that is tactical), and a signing up to the Mitchell principles. These differences represent the chasm between us, and a bridge over it is not apparent to us.

The current Talks process is a means to an end, not an end in itself. We find ourselves at an impasse, and it is our collective duty to overcome obstacles. We suggest below a possible way of achieving this. We cannot allow the current Talks structure to become an obstacle to progress itself.



## ALTERNATIVES

This hiatus should not be allowed to bring to a halt the political life of our Province however, as there are other ways in which we can proceed. UUP feels that there are a wide range of general confidence building measures which can be taken, the effect of which would be the generation of trust and confidence within the political system.

A protracted general election campaign should not be allowed to paralyse good government in Northern Ireland.

Given that even changes in government have only a marginal effect on the day to day life of the citizen, it is imperative that institutions in the Province be united in ensuring that priority is given to sound administration, unhindered by negative controversies.

It is vital that all those committed to democracy can play a role together to build on the wide areas of common interest that exist, and ensure that there is no political vacuum. In short we must decide on a series of things that we can actually DO.

## ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

UUP believes that a wide range of issues can be addressed, and addressed now. We have proposals which make suggestions covering 'all three strands', together with proposals in the areas of 'justice and rights' which, because of their special significance, merit particular attention.

These suggestions do not constitute a final resolution to the many problems we face; rather they represent an interim set of proposals, designed to help us work towards solutions, but in a way which involves no constitutional compromise on either side. We sketch out our suggestions hereunder;

Strand 1 matters.

There is a general desire amongst local politicians to have some influence over our economic, social and political fortunes. Local economic development has been one of our success stories over the last few years. Councils have been particularly effective here. Good cross party support exists for such measures.

Measure 1. UUP envisages that a structured relationship should be put in place between Government and local politicians,



which would be flexible enough to allow for the 'social partners' perhaps represented by the G7 or similar groups, to make a contribution, as required. The aims would include:- helping in the search for inward investment, the development of partnerships and a place where local politicians can learn more about the administration of Northern Ireland, and themselves, or with others, begin to contribute to policy formation in the social and economic fields. Political matters could also be raised or referred.

Measure 2. Local Government has been hampered in recent years by the failure of ALANI to attract widespread support. This should be rectified. UUP is willing to discuss with others a revitalised or replacement body. A new constitution for this body should confine its role to local government matters and ensure that it is representative of all Councils. Its principal committees and office-bearers should be reflective of the main political traditions as well as geographic diversity in Northern Ireland.

Strand 2&3 matters.

Measure 3. Working within the same structured relationship referred to above, UUP is willing to explore (outside the scope of the Anglo-Irish Agreement) how matters of mutual interest and benefit can be discussed or pursued with the appropriate representatives of the Republic of Ireland; these could be either transferred or non transferred matters.

Measure 4. UUP also envisages a particular emphasis on European issues in this area, and as would be the case in our interim Strand 1 proposals, see a specific role for our MEPs, whose co-operation has already set an example of what can be achieved.

UUP would be prepared to exchange views with other elected politicians on how we could address the void of misunderstanding that presently exists between politicians in Northern Ireland and those in the Republic of Ireland.

#### JUSTICE AND RIGHTS ISSUES

The whole question of human rights, group rights and other justice issues are very sensitive matters in our situation, but precisely because of this, we must seek a suitable mechanism to ensure that they are addressed.



Measure 5. The incorporation of the European Convention into UK domestic law would be our first preference, but a local option may also exist. Furthermore, a special protocol would need to be incorporated to take account of group issues; European examples from OSCE for instance, are worth discussing.

UUP is anxious to see discussion facilitated on matters such as:- victim support, the 'disappeared', prisons and prisoner issues, beatings, policing and police governance, relevant legislation, and inter-jurisdictional co-operation on terrorist issues.

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This is the 'UNEDITED' version of the transcript (also known as the 'Blacks').

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Take Number: G  
Next Take Number: H

## DÁIL ÉIREANN

14.00 (2 o'clock)

22 January 1997

### ^ Message from Seanad. ^

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Messages have been received from Seanad Éireann stating that it has accepted the Appropriation Bill, 1996, without amendment, and passed the Oireachtas (Miscellaneous Provisions) and Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices (Amendment) Bill, 1996, without amendment.

### ^ CEISTEANNA - QUESTIONS. ^

1. **Mr. B. Ahern** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on the prospects for peace and political progress in Northern Ireland in 1997. [1355/97]
2. **Mr. B. Ahern** asked the Taoiseach the plans, if any, he has in conjunction with the British Prime Minister to provide a motive force within the talks process



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to ensure their continuing viability. [1356/97]

3. **Mr. B. Ahern** asked the Taoiseach the further support, if any, he will give to the pre-Christmas peace initiative of John Hume. [1357/97]

4. **Mr. B. Ahern** asked the Taoiseach the plans, if any, the Government has for changes with regard to maintaining a channel of communication to Sinn Féin. [1358/97]

5. **Mr. B. Ahern** asked the Taoiseach if it remains the position that all parties to the Northern talks are required to maintain a strict adherence to the Mitchell Principles. [1359/97]

6. **Miss Harney** asked the Taoiseach the initiatives, if any, planned by the Government to inject new momentum into the peace process. [1371/97]

7. **Miss Harney** asked the Taoiseach the contacts, if any, between officials in his Department and Sinn Féin since Wednesday, 17 December 1996. [1372/97]

8. **Miss Harney** asked the Taoiseach the discussions, if any, he has had with the British Prime Minister since Wednesday, 17 December 1996. [1373/97]

**The Taoiseach:** I propose to take Questions 1 to 8 together.



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The responsibility for political progress rests in the first instance with the two Governments. We have exercised this responsibility through putting in place agreed procedures and mechanisms for the fair conduct of multi-party talks and the commencement of these talks on 10 June last year. In addition, we have made constant and unremitting efforts over the past seven months to move these talks into substantive negotiations in the three strands. The talks represent the best, and probably the only, way of achieving agreement among the parties.

The prospects for peace in Northern Ireland depend on all sides exercising their responsibilities. Of course, everybody does not have the same responsibility. People who kill, or encourage others to kill, bear a greater burden of responsibility for the lack of peace in Northern Ireland than those who passively support violence. Equally, those who passively support the politics of violence have a much higher responsibility for the lack of peace than those who support parties which reject violence. There is an onus on all democrats to speak and act against violence and sectarianism in all their manifestations. Violence and sectarianism continue because, regrettably, a minority continue to give them active or passive support.

The Government is convinced that, provided the will is there on all sides, and all are prepared to act responsibly, 1997 can be a year both of peace and of political progress. For our part, we will continue to do everything in our power, as we have done in the past, to secure these objectives. We will work in close co-operation with all who share, and who are committed to, exclusively peaceful and democratic methods of action. In particular, we will do everything we can to optimise the prospects for substantive progress in the multi-party talks, including, if possible, in advance of the general election in the United Kingdom. We continue to work in close contact with Mr. John Hume, with



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whom I recently had an extensive private meeting. We support his continuing efforts to obtain an IRA ceasefire.

On the question of contacts with Sinn Féin, the Government made clear, in response to a request for a meeting from the Sinn Féin leader, immediately after the IRA resumed its campaign by the bombing of Canary Wharf that we wanted the IRA ceasefire to be restored immediately, that the basis for the previous Government meetings with Sinn Féin had been that a total cessation of IRA violence was already in place, that further Ministerial meetings with Sinn Féin must be consistent with this long standing policy and that, notwithstanding the resumed IRA campaign, a meeting at official level could take place on the basis that Sinn Féin would bring forward its ideas on how the ceasefire could be restored at that meeting. That meeting took place and since then, there were a number of official level meetings within that channel of communication.

During the 11 month period in which these meetings were taking place, the Irish Government secured a fixed date for the opening of all party talks, eminent and independent chairmanship of the talks, agreed rules of procedure to protect the position of minority parties within the talks, Irish Government involvement in face to face discussions in the talks with parties, some of whom had never previously had contact with the Irish Government, the effective removal of the Washington Three precondition, as well as a clear commitment in statements from both Governments that Sinn Féin will be admitted to the talks once it complies with the terms set out publicly.

Despite all these advances, which were designed, *inter alia*, to secure an IRA ceasefire, and the meetings which were held at official level with Sinn Féin, we have seen in the interim - not an IRA ceasefire - but more and more IRA violence which has intensified to the point that at least nine IRA attack attempts, of a major kind, took place in the past



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three weeks.

IRA violence, more than anything else, has isolated the nationalist community in the North from all those who wish to help them to achieve parity of esteem. IRA violence is partitionist. IRA violence has provided a pretext and a context for sectarianism. IRA violence is an invasion of human rights which, in some nationalist areas, has substituted arbitrary and unaccountable penalisation by a secret organisation, for accountable justice through an open courts system.

The intensified activity on the part of the IRA, over Christmas and so far this year, makes it difficult to believe that the Republican movement is not now deliberately attempting to pursue a parallel ballot box and armalite strategy, which is unacceptable to democrats and which accordingly, should not be assisted politically or otherwise by a democratically constituted Government. The official channel of communication, to which I referred, can be used whenever the Government receives reliable assurances that an IRA ceasefire is attainable in a genuinely short term horizon, and that previously identified and realistically attainable things need to be discussed at the meeting, and done, that will achieve that end. If such assurances are received, meetings can be arranged at very short notice. The sole purpose of any such meeting would be to end IRA violence, once and for all, and quickly.

In response to question No. 5 from Deputy Ahern, I can confirm that all parties to the multi-party talks are indeed required to maintain a strict adherence to the Mitchell Principles. This is made clear beyond doubt in the 28 February 1996 communiqué, the ground rules paper, and the agreed rules of procedure for the talks.

I have already reported to the House on my meeting with Prime Minister Major on 9 December last. I do not believe it is always appropriate or useful to report on every



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contact with the Prime Minister. I can however assure the House that this year, as during last year, intensive contact will be maintained at political and official level with Downing Street wherever desirable or necessary. This is of course additional to contacts already under way with the British authorities, including intensive contacts on a daily basis in the context of the multi-party talks.

The multi-party talks process, as any political realist could have seen from the outset, is an inherently difficult one. It was set up to achieve agreement on profoundly divisive questions affecting allegiance, between a diverse range of parties, some of whom previously had little or no dialogue with one another. We need to remind ourselves that the underlying assumption of the peace process has been, from the outset, that such an agreement, although difficult, is possible. The concept that such an agreement could be imposed, rather than freely negotiated, is contrary to the basis on which the all-party talks were sought and agreed to. The Governments do, of course, have a responsibility to give proactive leadership in the talks at appropriate junctures.

The slow pace of the talks is naturally a matter of regret. To those in the majority community in Northern Ireland who may be reluctant to move from traditional positions, I would point out that the outcome of the talks has to be approved by the people by means of a referendum. To the minority community, I would point out that the involvement and endorsement of the Irish Government is contingent on the achievement of an agreement within the three strands which is fair and just to nationalist aspirations. Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, so all parties have a specifically designed structure, within which they can make contingent concessions to one another's positions, in the interests of an ultimate overall agreement. I urge all parties in the talks do that, so that there can be forward movement, and Northern Ireland can enjoy a stable and universally accepted





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political structure, which is the precondition for all durable economic and social  
development.

Section to follow:

Section H follows.

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Last Modified by: Ann Maxwell at 22/01/97 15.45.57  
Previously modified by: Valerie Duff, Ann Maxwell