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From: PS/Secretary of State
07 November 2000

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Mr Jeffrey - O

MEETING WITH GERRY ADAMS, 6 NOVEMBER

Summary: Adams probes HMG's willingness to move on normalisation and OTRs. Stresses such movement essential to persuade IRA to re-engage with de Chastelain. Secretary of State makes clear that further movement is only possible on basis of an end to violence, re-engagement with de Chastelain and support for the new police service. No meeting of minds. Adams to meet the Prime Minister.

Detail

2. Gerry Adams said he had had separate meetings with David Trimble, Seamus Mallon and John Hume. He had told David Trimble that the Ard Comhairle had directed him to proceed with legal action on the flags issue and separately on the UUP decision about nominating Sinn Fein Ministers to the NSMC. He did not want to resort to the courts, but was bound by the Ard Comhairle's decision. Psychologically, republicans were drawing a line: they had no real faith in the issues being worked out politically. David Trimble had argued that the IRA should re-engage with de Chastelain - but he understood that the IRA needed a context to enable them to do so. We had limited time available to create such a context. He was pessimistic about the prospects, but this was his objective.

3. The Secretary of State said the solution could be easily stated: David Trimble needed to lift the sanction on Sinn Fein Ministers and the IRA needed to re-engage with de Chastelain. HMG should not have to offer 'sweeteners' to the IRA to achieve such re-engagement. The IRA had given a commitment and should stand by it. Similarly, HMG had given commitments to achieve progress on a number of issues by June 2001 and was following through on those commitments.

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On OTRs, we had done everything possible within the legal constraints on us. Legislating for an amnesty for OTRs would be extremely difficult in circumstances where decommissioning had not started and violence was continuing.

5. The Secretary of State said that if the Government wanted to take genuine risks on normalisation and OTRs, we could only do so if we were confident of a real dividend from the IRA — in terms of re-engagement with de Chastelain, decommissioning being taken seriously, IRA activities being brought to an end and active support for the new police service. Republicans needed to appreciate that continuing violence imposed great constraints on HMG. Without an end to violence and decommissioning being taken seriously, we could not go further on OTRs and demilitarisation. However, if we had the makings of an agreement on these issues, the Government would be prepared to do business. But we were not prepared to give more in order to get the IRA to fulfil a commitment it had already given. That would leave us open to ridicule.

6. Gerry Adams said there was no point in going on. His assessment was that HMG did not have the will to create the context in which the current difficulties could be sorted out. The Secretary of State replied that Sinn Fein was over-negotiating and grossly miscalculating the likely results of its approach. Gerry Adams accused the Secretary of State of re-writing the history of what was agreed at Hillsborough earlier in the year. The IRA — not Sinn Fein — had struck a deal with HMG. From the IRA’s point of view, HMG had not kept its promises. He was simply trying to bridge the gap between the two sides. HMG’s approach was primarily focused on the management of Unionism. Solving the crisis facing the process appeared to be a secondary consideration. The Secretary of State replied that the Government needed to have confidence in the IRA’s willingness to re-
engage with de Chastelain and bring violence to an end. Continuing violence and
the retention and procurement of weapons made it very difficult for the Government
to move further on normalisation and OTRs.

7. Gerry Adams reminded the Secretary of State about current events in the
Middle East. He was trying to manage a situation where Sinn Fein had been forced
to go through a 'decontamination process', following which the GFA had not been
implemented for 18 months in terms of creating the political institutions.
Thereafter, the institutions had been in place for a very short period before being
suspended. It had only been possible to 'resurrect' the institutions after a great
deal of hard work by Sinn Fein. Now the UUP had damaged the NSMC which was
of great importance to Sinn Fein. The whole process was being held to ransom.
The UUP were also demanding a moratorium on police reform and changes to the
remit of the Decommissioning Commission. There was very little time left before the
UUP review in January 2001. The Government's approach was the equivalent of
'fiddling while Rome burns'. The Secretary of State said this analysis portrayed the
UUP in an overly negative light. Gerry Adams acknowledged that unionists had
come a long way, but argued that HMG should not measure the rights of
nationalists through a 'unionist prism'. We needed to face up to the crisis facing
the process. The current position on the NSMC was not viable. The IRA had said it
would only enter discussions with de Chastelain in a certain context.

8. The Secretary of State said it was clear that Sinn Fein's view was that the
context was for HMG to deliver more on OTRs and normalisation. However, the
Government had made very significant moves on both issues. It was unreasonable
for the IRA to accuse HMG of not meeting its commitments. He suspected this was
part of an elaborate negotiating ploy. He and the Prime Minister were prepared to
move further on these issues but only on the basis of a proper commitment by the
IRA to non-violence and to serious discussion about putting arms verifiably beyond
use. Yet he had been told that there was 'no point' in raising these issues.

9. Gerry Adams said that if the Secretary of State was 'going to be so obtuse',
there was no point in continuing. His parting shot was to ask whether the
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Secretary of State intended to be present for the meeting with the Prime Minister. He said he was ‘mindful of the need to avoid a situation where the Prime Minister says one thing and the Secretary of State says the exact opposite’. The Secretary of State replied that both he and the Prime Minister would be very clear and honest with Sinn Fein.

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