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Letter from John Hume MP to Prime Minister Thatcher

Dear PM,

I understand that you are due to meet the leaders of the Unionist parties in the near future. There have been some calls recently for "gestures" towards them from the SDLP. Apart from the fact that I do not believe that they are the sort of people who would appreciate "gestures" from ourselves, I do not believe at the moment that they are listening seriously to anyone and in their present mood would be likely to reject any offer, thereby making dialogue more difficult in the future when they pass through the present phase.

However I think it important that you should be aware of our position on the two areas where there appears to be some concern. The SDLP are willing to enter into discussions with the Unionists on Devolution or any matter that pertains to peace and stability and having reached agreement with them on the form of Devolution, to go then to the Electorate in an election to a new Assembly and put the Devolution Agreement before them. I am sure that you will appreciate the strength of such a position if for the first time we have a united approach to the Electorate.

Secondly the SDLP believe that the Anglo-Irish Agreement creates for the first time the framework of equality in which a genuine process of reconciliation can begin. We believe that in practice this means that there must be a willingness on our part and on the part of the people that we represent to play the fullest possible part in all aspects of life in Northern Ireland and in all institutions.

In particular we want to play the fullest possible part in the institutions of law and order. The Agreement provides for rapid progress in this area and we look forward to such progress.

In our view it is only by such a reconciliation process and by working together to build, our community that we will ever break down the barriers of prejudice, hatred and distrust that have disfigured this part of Ireland for so long. The building of trust born of working together as equals is in our view the only way to diminish the distrust and prejudices of centuries.

I would of course like to meet you myself in the near future to elaborate in more detail on our position but in the meantime I thought that you might find the above of some value in advance of your meeting with the Unionists.

Yours sincerely,

John Hume  
3 February 1986.