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10 DOWNING STREET
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THE PRIME MINISTER

27 April 1995

Dear Adams,

Events since I telephoned you on Monday afternoon have not been encouraging.

When we spoke, I stressed the importance of Sinn Fein respecting the understanding we had set out in our correspondence with them. To make doubly sure that there was no room for doubt about the basis for Michael Ancram's meeting with Sinn Fein in exploratory dialogue, we sent Sinn Fein an advance copy of our press release, as you suggested. I had hoped that, under your persuasion, Sinn Fein would handle this sensibly, and not call the agreement in question.

Regrettably, Sinn Fein have been up to their old tricks since our announcement. Adams, McGuinness and McLaughlan have made a series of statements calculated to undermine the understandings. They have falsely suggested, for example, that they are now going to enter full political talks without the necessary progress on decommissioning, and that we have agreed to equate decommissioning with demilitarisation. Despite repeated questions from the press, they have avoided giving clear assurances that they will now discuss decommissioning in its own right with a view to resolving the problem.

As you will appreciate, if they waste our time by pursuing a similar line in the dialogue itself, the exploratory talks are likely to break down very

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rapidly. It may be that Sinn Fein are simply using rhetoric as a camouflage. But we have received a foolish letter from Sinn Fein (dated 24 April but actually sent by fax on the afternoon of 25 April) which tries to change the terms of trade and go back on the understanding we set out. To be absolutely clear, when Michael Ancram meets them (we have suggested next Tuesday) we are expecting, after any opening statements, to get straight in to a serious discussion about decommissioning in its own right. That can be followed, as a separate issue, by whatever questions Sinn Fein want to raise. We have set this approach out repeatedly in our letters and press statement, and Sinn Fein have not challenged it. If, nonetheless, they try to avoid the issue of arms at the first meeting, or again fail to respond substantively, it will be clear their commitments to a serious and constructive discussion are worthless. Michael Ancram would have to respond accordingly.

Beyond the first meeting, we are entirely serious in our determination that substantial progress on arms decommissioning must be achieved. We do not expect to resolve this overnight. We are ready to be flexible and imaginative about the mechanics. But, as I know you understand, there is no prospect of unionists sitting down with Sinn Fein without substantial progress. So I hope, therefore, that you will now deliver an extremely firm message to Sinn Fein that progress will not be possible unless they tackle decommissioning seriously in the exploratory talks. As even the Irish Times has said, Sinn Fein can be under no illusion that the question of IRA arms must be resolved before it can be an equal partner in political talks. I could not have put it better myself; and this of course is a position which both you and Bill Clinton have also underlined.

What is absolutely essential is that we should all work to ensure that decommissioning actually begins as soon as possible. Our two governments have put together a plan on the modalities. Sinn Fein (and the loyalist parties)

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need to realise that there is no way in which this requirement for full entry into political life can be avoided. It has widespread support, is reflected in the Downing Street Declaration, and is not a condition on which there is room for compromise. We shall be making this crystal clear to Sinn Fein in the coming days.

I must say, frankly, that the timing and thrust of your statement in the Dail on 25 April also caught us by surprise. I know that you made a general reference to this in your CBI speech before Easter. But it would have been useful to have discussed this, for instance when we were on the telephone only the previous day. Patrick Mayhew ensured you knew, through the Liaison Group, of our announcement of bilaterals six days in advance, and was then prepared to amend the terms of the announcement in the light of concerns you expressed to him personally. I think it essential that our two governments should not only work together but be seen to be working together.

We have many channels of communication, directly between our offices, between Patrick Mayhew and Dick Spring, and through Maryfield. I hope you will agree that we must make sure that co-ordination works properly, so that we can sort these problems out before they arise rather than afterwards. Do please either pick up the phone or have your people do so at any time, and I shall do likewise. It will be useful also to find time when we are both in Moscow to take stock.

*Your sincerely,
John H.*

Mr. John Bruton, T.D.