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Note of Meeting between Taoiseach and President Clinton

Washington, 9 September 1996

President Clinton welcoming the Taoiseach to the Oval Office indicated his desire to discuss the peace process and also EU/US relations. In regard to the latter he mentioned cooperation in regard to dealing with the narcotics trade as particularly important. The Taoiseach agreeing with the agenda also emphasised the need for cooperation between the US and the EU so as to facilitate better trade.

The Taoiseach gave a briefing to the President on the situation in Northern Ireland. He indicated that he was cautiously optimistic for future developments based on what had transpired that day in Belfast in the multi-party talks. He underlined that the key pre requisite for progress was a restoration of the IRA ceasefire. In response to a query from President Clinton on the pressure to exclude the political representatives of the Loyalist paramilitaries from the all-party talks the Taoiseach indicated that this was somewhat of a political ploy on the part of the Democratic Unionist Party and that as long as the Loyalist paramilitaries held to the ceasefire he did not see any justification for such an exclusion. The Taoiseach emphasised again the absolute importance of a ceasefire by the IRA but he indicated that it must be convincing and lasting ceasefire and not be seen as a tactical ploy. He was of the view that such an occurrence could be brought about.

The Taoiseach also referred to the very regrettable increase in sectarian animosity arising from events during the summer. He instanced Drumcree in this regard and the Nationalist reaction that had resulted. Notwithstanding this however the Taoiseach emphasised that he remained hopeful that the talks process would succeed.

In response to a query from the President the Taoiseach indicated that the position of Mr David Trimble was vital. His view was that he should be encouraged so as to make him more open to dialogue and he specifically thought that it might be useful if the US administration was to

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encourage him to visit the US. In regard to the SDLP the Taoiseach pointed out that they had received a major set back as a result of the elections held earlier this year when there had been a considerable increase in the vote for Sinn Fein. He stated that there was a slight dichotomy in the approach of the SDLP in that John Hume was focussed very much on restoring the IRA ceasefire, but others within the SDLP were more focussed on the Unionists and trying to agree a strategy with them whereby the all-party talks could succeed.

The Taoiseach thanked the President for his personal interest in the situation in Northern Ireland and in particular for his appointment of Senator George Mitchell whom he praised for his work in relation to the peace talks. President Clinton indicated his continuing support for the process and for the work of both Governments. The U.S. would do all it could to try and help the situation.

Discussion then turned to EU/US relations. At the outset the Taoiseach indicated that he would like to have an EU/US Summit held in Dublin on 4 December. He stated that he was aware that the outcome of these summits had not perhaps been great in the past possibly because of a lack of political preparation on the part of the EU side. It was however his intention to use the Special European Council to be held on 5 October to inter alia prepare the political agenda from the EU side for this summit. President Clinton was non committal as to the date of the summit but did indicate that in principle he was in favour of it occurring.

The Taoiseach instanced areas where cooperation should be brought to a successful fruition such as customs, standards and chemical precursors in the areas of drugs. The Taoiseach also mentioned the need for cooperation in relation to drug trafficking from Latin American and the Caribbean. President Clinton indicated that he would particularly like to see standards of certification issues sorted out as soon as possible.

Turning to the Helms Burton legislation on Cuba, President Clinton outlined the background to the Helms Burton legislation saying that there had been huge American reaction to the shooting

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down of the two air planes which were not in Cuban waters. President Clinton indicated that he was hopeful that something positive might be possible in this area in the context of the EU Summit. The key would be for the EU to move in a tangible way to promote human rights and democracy in Cuba. President Clinton referring to the good personal relationship he had with the Taoiseach stated that the Irish Presidency might be an opportunity to make progress. It would be useful to get the relevant officials to work together to try to resolve the situation. He referred to the meeting which Stuart Eizenstat had with the Tánaiste in Dublin the previous week and said that his reports were that this had been a good meeting.

Again he underlined his personal commitment to try to resolve this and hoped that something could be sorted out for any EU/US Summit that would take place in December.

President Clinton also underlined the importance that the US attached to KEDO initiative. He pointed out that the US had invested a large amount of time and resources in this initiative which was aimed at dismantling the nuclear capability of North Korea. This was a vitally important task not only in terms of the security of the Korean peninsula but also in terms of developing relations with Asia, including China. He pointed out that Japan was a major contributor to the cost of this initiative and he expressed the hope that Ireland would use its good influence during the Presidency to ensure that the EU would make a contribution to the work and that also they would take up a position on the board of the project. The Secretary of State Warren Christopher pointed out that the amount involved - 20 million dollars was not high compared to the commitment put in by Japan. He also instanced the Japanese commitment in financial terms to the situation of Bosnia.

Discussion then turned to the Middle East. President Clinton mentioning that he had met the Prime Minister Netanyahu earlier that day indicated that he was cautiously optimistic in relation to progress in the Middle East peace process. He instanced concessions that had been made by Israel such as increasing the number of Palestinians allowed to work in Israel. In his view the key for third parties was not to complicate the situation by appearing to be unduly partisan on

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one side or the other. Such an approach would only tend to make the aggrieved party more hardline in their approach to the situation. He accepted that an increase in Jewish settlements would be a problem and that any such policy must also be accompanied by concessions to Arafat. In this regard he noted that Hebron was an important issue for Arafat. Overall President Clinton noted the huge investment that the US had made in time and effort to try to resolve the situation.

The President underlined his hope that the EU would be able to influence Middle East Peace in a constructive way but not in a way that would be partisan. It was important to get the EU to ease off on the issue of Orient House and it was his belief that Arafat was not particularly pressing this issue. If the present round of talks could continue and the atmosphere improve he believed that it was possible that an Israeli-Syrian peace process could also be worked out by way of an appropriate formula. He emphasised the need for a well established and authoritative and Palestinian authority that would be able to deal with the situation in Jerusalem. The bottom line was that both Arafat and Netanyahu needed each other.

A. Dunning
11 September 1996