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DATE

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(Including This Sheet)

SUBJECT: NI - Forum Suspended

MESSAGE:-

The following NIO press release may be of interest

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Our Ref: 03/425

Date: 11 March 1907

NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM SUSPENDED (NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE PRESS RELEASE OF 1 MARCH 1997)

A draft order suspending the Northern Ireland Forum was laid in Parliament today by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP. The Order withdraws the provisions of Section 3 of the Northe Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 which established the Forum in June 1996.

The Secretary of State has concluded, following the decision of the plenary session of the talks on 5 March to adjourn to 3 June, and taking account of the circumstances, that the talks are suspended. He is thus obliged under Section 7(4) of the Act, subject to Parliamentary approval, to make the Orde Debates in each House on the Order are likely next week.

The provisions establishing the Forum would in any event have lapsed at the of May. It will be possible for a new Secretary of State to bring before th next Parliament a further Order, reviving the Forum for a further period (of to a year).

The Secretary of State said:

'It appears to me that, in all the circumstances, the talks are suspended. Accordingly the Entry into Negotiations Act places a duty upon me to make an Order withdrawing from effect the provisions which established the Forum. T Order will be debatable in Parliament.

'It will be a matter for a new Secretary of State, and a new Parliament, to consider the revival of the Forum. I do not doubt that my successor will wi to decide this question very soon, in the light of the resumption of the tal on 3 June.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- 1. The Forum was established under Section 3 of the Northern Ireland (Entry Negotiations, etc) Act 1996. It is open to all 110 delegates returned at th election of 30 May 1996 in Northern Ireland, from amongst whom parties also selected participants in the multi-party talks. Sinn Fein were entitled to attend the Forum (unlike the talks, to which they can only be admitted after unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire), but have never done so. The SDLP initially participated, but withdrew after the civil disturbances of la summer.
- The Forum's remit is to discuss issues relevant to promoting dialogue an understanding within Northern Ireland. The Act makes clear that it is a deliberative body only, without legislative executive or administrative functions. It expressly provides that the Forum has no power to determine t conduct, course or outcome of the multi-party talks, though they may conside matters that the negotiations may refer to them (no such reference has so fa been made).

2. The provisions establishing the Forum lapse at the end of May this year ection 7(1) of the Act). The Secretary of State may however provide by ord that they shall cease to have effect at an earlier point (Section 7(3)); an he is obliged to do so if it appears to him that the talks are concluded or suspended (Section 7(4)). He can by another Order revive the forum provisio to any point up the end of May 1998, when they will lapse for good.

4. The order is formally titled the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations etc) Act 1996 (Cessation of Section 3) Order 1997.

ENDS