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Reference Code:	2003/16/466
Title:	Copy letter from Donal O'Sullivan, Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain, to R McDonagh, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting on a meeting with Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Sir Alec Douglas-Home, regarding the non-attendance of nationalist representatives at the upcoming conference on power-sharing and devolution in Northern Ireland to be held at Darlington, England.
Creation Date(s):	21 September, 1972
Level of description:	Item
Extent and medium:	2 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
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PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

21st September 1972

Dear Assistant Secretary

When I called late yesterday afternoon on the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on another matter he brought up briefly the Northern Ireland question.

He expressed disappointment that the political representatives on the minority side now seem unlikely to attend the Whitelaw Conference which is to commence on the 25th. While Sir Alec had serious doubts as to whether the Conference, even if fully attended, could achieve very much, he regarded it as "part of the necessary procedure to be gone through". It would, he felt, be a great pity if the SDLP in particular, were to stay away. I agreed that their presence would be of very considerable importance, and wondered whether Mr Whitelaw could not, at this late stage, make a further gesture on internment which might help them to change their minds. I added that a further release of internees and some undertaking, not necessarily in the most specific of terms, about the phasing out of the remainder of internment might well be of assistance to the SDLP at this stage. Sir Alec said he thought the point was worthy of consideration and that he would make it his business to see Mr Whitelaw in the matter today.

Sir Alec then went on to say that it is essential now to move towards finding a political solution. The basis for such a solution will not emerge from next week's

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Conference and the Government will, in the circumstances, have to come forward with its own ideas. Sir Alec observed on the fact that, at political level, the majority community in the North seems to be in a state of disarray. I observed that Mr Faulkner seems to have lost a good deal of influence and Sir Alec's comment on this was "a good thing too". He went on to say that Craig's standing with the UDA is also on the wane and added that "one has only to look at Craig's face to realise how stupid he is". Paisley appears to be acquiring increased stature, but he himself would still have some doubts as to how far Paisley could be relied upon to do the right thing.

Yours sincerely

DONAL W. SULLIVAN

Ambassador

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