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STRICTLY PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Secretary of State.

The Taoiseach interrupted his election campaign last evening to consider reports that the British Government is about to embark on a definitive stage in its formulation of a new initiative in Northern Ireland. The information available to us suggests that the policy proposals in their latest form would be certain to be unacceptable to the minority in Northern Ireland and hence unworkable. The Taoiseach asked me to convey our concern to you without delay.

During the election campaign here, we have deliberately refrained from any criticism of your initiative despite the fact that the Opposition have not hesitated to do so and despite the politically significant fact that the SDLP have publicly criticised the proposals in outright terms.

It appeared to us from statements by yourself and Lord Gowrie, as indeed from earlier exchanges in the Anglo-Irish framework, that there were two basic objectives involved in your approach:

- (1) The objective of devising a system of devolution which would command the consensus of both sections of the community in Northern Ireland and would be proof against boycott: and

/...

- (2) The objective of accommodating the two identities in Northern Ireland in any political solution.

For our part we fully support these objectives.

Reports of the proposals now being considered indicate that they are not likely to achieve the above objectives. This is a matter for serious concern. The position is all the more serious because of earlier expectations aroused by reports in the media of a willingness to consider ideas under both headings which went far beyond the present proposals.

As we understand them the proposals now seem confined to very limited tinkering on the question of identity. On the question of devolution the present proposals would, in public perception, not go much further than the majority report of the Convention which was itself properly rejected by your Government. We believe that if your Government were now to move along these lines the result in Northern Ireland would be a very serious setback. The effect moreover on Anglo-Irish relations would be damaging as no Irish Government could publicly support such proposals and this would inevitably be seen as a public breakdown of a newly-established Anglo-Irish relationship.

We are anxious to have the best possible climate for the further improvement of Anglo-Irish relations. Such a climate would facilitate the further development of cooperation in the areas now under discussion including the ideas in relation to security and fugitive offenders which have emerged from the discussions of the Attorneys General and from our own subsequent consideration of the possible desirability of making a breakthrough on this front.

We must urge most strongly that any move to give definition to proposals which would have these negative effects should be deferred for a ^{short} brief period to give time for further consultation and to give time for our Government to take decisions which could provide a further helpful input. We must emphasise that it would not be understood by any part of public opinion here were your Government to choose to proceed along the lines indicated at the precise moment of the virtual vacuum created by the final stage of a national election campaign. Once the election is over, we would hope, as I indicated to you at our London meeting, to make a contribution to the formulation of a package which would be as widely acceptable as possible.

With all personal good wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Senator James Dooge
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland