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cc Taoiseach
Tánaiste
Secretary
Mr. Nally
A-I Section
Amb. London

12 February 1987

Mr. E. O Tuathail
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Eamonn

I saw the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in London at his request yesterday evening. King's Private Secretary, Watkins, was present. The following are the main items.

"Statement" on SACHR

King said he was "horrified" to see the News Letter headline on Diplock courts. This had arisen from a letter which had been issued to SACHR. The letter had been prepared and finalised some time back. He greatly regretted the fact that it had been issued at this time. "Somebody had slipped up".

Initiative on Sinn Fein

King said that he wanted to see me to consult me on a "personal basis" about an initiative he had in mind. He wanted to have this form of consultation (which he has not sought on any other topic at any time) in view of the electoral situation in our State.

He said I would be aware that Richard Needham had for the past year been working on ideas as to what might be done in relation

to the serious problem caused by Sinn Fein to unionist members of local councils. King said he was particularly anxious to do something in this area quickly so as to encourage those Official Unionist councillors, who are already substantial but increasing in number, to get off the hook of abstentionism. He was also personally deeply sympathetic to their position on this issue.

The idea was to publish a "consultation document" which would set out a number of options which might be considered as ways of dealing with the problem. While he did not say that internment or proscription would figure in the document, he mentioned these to me as ideas which had been looked at and rejected at this time. The idea that would be seriously put forward would be a requirement on prospective candidates for local elections making a declaration at the time of their candidature. The declaration would involve an undertaking not to participate in, or support, organisations which were proscribed in Northern Ireland.

King said he was considering publishing this document a week after our election date.

I pointed out that our electoral season would not be completed until the date of election of a Taoiseach which would not happen before March 10. I suggested that any controversial initiative could be damaging to both Governments were it to be undertaken during that period. I said I could not give a view as to the likely Government reaction to the thought which was under consideration by King and Needham. I said however that when King had suggested at the very first meeting of the Conference that ideas in this area should be discussed in the Conference, the Minister for Foreign Affairs had immediately agreed. I said I was sure that it would be the best approach to have the matter discussed first with the Irish Government before any initiative was taken. If nothing else, the British side should see this as being to their own advantage.

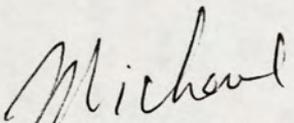
King said he would be careful about the timing aspect and he stressed that the consultation document would make it very clear that there was no commitment to action here. I said, stressing that I was speaking personally, that it would strike us as a bit odd that the declaration was intended only for local elections and not for British elections. King admitted that there would be insurmountable problems in having the requirement apply to candidates in Britain for national elections.

Note: On returning to Maryfield today I reminded my opposite number, Elliott, that the Irish side had agreed in December 1985 to consider ideas in this area in the Conference and I suggested that it was therefore essential that that route be taken before any initiative is undertaken by the British side.

Article 1 of the Agreement

King spoke at length and with feeling about concerns in London in relation to the current controversy in our jurisdiction about this matter.

Yours sincerely


Michael Lillis

P.S. I am reporting separately on an issue that has arisen on the security side.

M.L.