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**Transcript of telephone conversation
between the Taoiseach and Tony Blair
Wednesday 21st January 1998**

Prime Minister:

Hi Bertie.

Taoiseach:

Hello Tony, how are you.

Prime Minister:

I am fine, thank you, and how are you doing.

Taoiseach:

I am in great form, not a bother, other than the depressing weather, but I am not worried about that.

Prime Minister:

The what.

Taoiseach:

I say the depressing weather.

Prime Minister:

Ah yes, it is. I was over actually in the Hague last night. We had a dinner for Wim Kok, they all seem, they are getting ready for their elections there.

Taoiseach:

When I was Minister for Finance, he was Minister for Finance, so I spent three years working with him.

Prime Minister:

Yes, he is a good man.

Taoiseach:

He is a good guy, his elections are February, is it?

Prime Minister:

No, he's got local elections in March and then he has got his Parliamentary elections in May.

Taoiseach:

Ah yes, he has a few months more to...

Prime Minister:

Yes.

Taoiseach:

I think he is doing well in the Polls anyway, the last time I saw any figures, he was doing well.

Prime Minister:

Well, his party is a little bit more dodgy, but I think he will probably, he will come back.

Taoiseach:

He will come back, yes, good.

Prime Minister:

So, now.

Taoiseach:

We were on the one tune last night anyway.

Prime Minister:

Absolutely.

Taoiseach:

Our remarks were being well covered.

Prime Minister:

It's, I mean we are just going to have to do what we can at the moment in the, in the....

Taoiseach:

difficult situation.

Prime Minister:

In the murders and killings, I mean it's obviously, it's a terrible situation.

Taoiseach:

Yes, I mean, you know, it's very hard to know. All the indications are there are people who are former UDA, UFF guys, but they have probably transferred over. I mean nobody can be sure.

Prime Minister:

Yes.

Taoiseach:

And I don't know what anyone can do about that, but there is talks ...

Prime Minister:

I mean we don't think that Gary McMichael and people have got anything to do with this.

Taoiseach:

No, no that does not seem to be the case.

Prime Minister:

And we had a meeting with Sinn Fein as well, which, I mean, I think went well quite well.

Taoiseach:

Yes.

Prime Minister:

In the sense it allowed them to put their points.

Taoiseach:

Right.

Prime Minister:

And, I mean I think that really on the substance they don't have much of a problem or it's not as much as much as a presentational difficulty in the way that it came across for them. But one point that they were making, which I am considering how to make progress on, is that it is very difficult for them if Trimble won't actually talk to them properly.

Taoiseach:

Yes. Apparently, I was just going through this the other day, what actually happens in the talks, because I find it hard to understand how they are all in the one room and they don't talk to each other. But apparently they don't and apparently the logistics is that he just doesn't answer. He has only apparently answered one question through the Chair in three and a half months.

Prime Minister:

Yes, well apparently on Monday, it was a little bit better.

Taoiseach:

Yes.

Prime Minister:

But I will try and do what I can on that front, because that is the complaint that they have that I think is a reasonable complaint. Now Bertie, I just wanted to say to you on Bloody Sunday. I mean following your call, I have been going back and looking at this material very, very carefully indeed, because I mean, you know you couldn't have made it clearer to me how

Taoiseach:

I appreciate that, it's a big one for us.

Prime Minister:

Now the trouble is I am not really in a position in the next couple of days to say something on the Inquiry. Although I mean I hope to be in a position next week, because presumably it is important that something happens before the anniversary.

Taoiseach:

Or there around, you know, I mean I have been holding back the publication of the document, because I don't want to make things worse, you know I am not sure if it would or not, but I ...

Prime Minister:

Well it helps if we are not under too much pressure on this. I mean I am going back and actually studying the whole thing myself and I looked at it first over, on Saturday and Sunday and I will have another look at it this weekend now and really go back over it again.

Taoiseach:

Well I appreciate that.

Prime Minister:

Now, but as I say I am just not in a position to give a final ruling on it at the moment. Now what I wanted to know really from you is whether it is helpful or unhelpful for Mo to say something tomorrow, which she is quite keen to do, which is along the lines of an apology and then just saying we're still considering the issue of an Inquiry. Or whether, as Paddy I think was rather suggesting to John Homes, that it maybe just be better for her to say nothing in those circumstances until we are ready to make a full statement.

Taoiseach:

Yes, I think that there is no point because all, it will just get around of talk again, maybe just hold on until you make a decision. It's in our papers here today that there is unlikely to be anything in the Parliament and that the matter is still being debated.

Prime Minister:

Yes, I have actually, I am doing Prime Minister's questions this afternoon, I have actually got a question down on it from one of my folk, but I will simply give something fairly sort of anodyne at the minute.

Taoiseach:

Well that's fine. I am actually in Derry on Friday, but I mean, that's a promise I have made back to them for, oh, five or six months, since the election, but I mean other than just, you know stating what I have always stated and then I am going over to do the Chamber of Commerce in Belfast, I won't be over hyping anything.

Prime Minister:

Right, yes, okay.

Taoiseach:

I am meeting the committee, I am meeting the relatives, but I meet them regularly, they come down here all of the time.

Prime Minister:

But I think the less in a sense that, the less pressure there is at the minute. Anyway we will let you know well in advance what we are going to do and why. But I just wanted to explain why, I don't think tomorrow I am in a position to be definitive.

Taoiseach:

No, that's okay Tony, I mean I just live in hope that it will go right, because it is a big one.

Prime Minister:

Well I mean I...

Taoiseach:

You understand that, I know that.

Prime Minister:

I mean there are huge sort of ramifications of this around this place as well. But anyway I promise you I am looking at it as carefully as I possibly can and doing it personally.

Taoiseach:

Okay. The other thing about next week Tony is trying to get together this document on the North/South, the Strand II, but I think our people are meeting later on and then there is a Liaison Group. But you know, my line here has been that the basis of all of this is the Framework Document and it's fairly well spelt out in that. Funny enough, Sinn Fein had never really agreed, or never agreed to the Framework Document.

Prime Minister:

Yes, I know, but now it suddenly seem to have ...

Taoiseach:

Yes

Prime Minister:

... the higher grounds, yes.

Taoiseach:

Some of their remarks in the last few days make it seem as if they do. By the way I think I said it to you the other day, I think your meeting on Monday was far better than my meeting on Friday, you may have picked that up from some of your people.

Prime Minister:

Well probably, I mean it's probably the same thing that sometimes Trimble will be better with you than he is with me if you see what I mean.

Taoiseach:

We had a bit of a shouting match. It kind of started that way and ended that way, but I mean I think that probably had to happen anyway, so.

Prime Minister:

I mean it's difficult for them, I mean we have got to, I mean the truth of the matter is throughout this we are having to try and I mean it obviously isn't helpful for me to go on about how close this is to the Framework Document, because that then puts Trimble in a difficult position.

Taoiseach:

Sure.

Prime Minister:

I mean the truth of the matter is, objectively of course, it is certainly within the context of the Framework Document, there is no doubt about that, because it follows the same three principles. But we have just got to try and manage this our own way. I mean you have obviously got to try and manage it in a way that makes sure that Nationalist opinion doesn't think that there has been a breach of the Framework Document.

Taoiseach:

Sure.

Prime Minister:

And in a sense what I have got to do is to try for the Unionists to say well look, never mind going back over whether it is or it isn't a Framework Document, just look at the substance of this and lets start talking about, you know, the basis of it. And I think that, you know, between the two of us, we should be able to manage that situation.

Taoiseach:

I think that if, you know, all the killings apart, if they concentrate on their minds it's not too far away from getting a good document if we can just force it on.

Prime Minister:

No I agree with that and ..

Taoiseach:

But unfortunately these guys trying to knock us off course will be a big problem, not for you and I, but for them, but we must keep pushing it on.

Prime Minister:

It is so ghastly and tragic really. I mean I just, I mean, because the trouble is, you know, we can do everything we can in terms of negotiation and talking to people, but there is no possible Government policy that can deal with the situation where people will just pull up outside a club or a taxi rank and just murder somebody.

Taoiseach:

I presume the Security Forces will be trying all they can to nail down these guys which is...

Prime Minister:

Well we are, I mean I have put a very, very strong message through the system. I also incidentally have raised with them the issue about West Belfast and checking the people coming out, but not the people coming in and that type of thing, you know and I mean....

Taoiseach:

I am not saying you can stop them all, but at least it would give confidence to people on the ground.

Prime Minister:

That is very, very important, because I mean what I have said to them is that this in a sense is a test of their own objectivity.

Taoiseach:

Yes, yes. Well I know you can't be on every street in Northern Ireland, but at least if they look as if they are pushing it hard. They used to say there is only 60 of these guys, but I imagine more have filtered through from the other organisations, so there is probably far more than that now.

Prime Minister:

And the trouble is you only need a handful.

Taoiseach:

Ah, sure that's always been the case up there.

Prime Minister:

I mean what is, what was just so bizarre is if making progress on the substance you just have the killers end up

Taoiseach:

Yes, that's it.

Prime Minister:

Determining the agenda.

Taoiseach:

And there is no shortage. Anyway Tony I appreciate that, so it would be probably next week is kind of what you are working to.

Prime Minister:

I mean what we should do is maybe touch base early next week and then I will let you know exactly what's happened.

Taoiseach:

Okay, good luck in Parliament.

Prime Minister:

Thank you.

Taoiseach:

Thanks a lot Tony.

Prime Minister:

All the best.

Taoiseach:

Bye, bye.

ENDS.