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10 December 1997

[Dear John,]

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH SINN FÉIN - 11 DECEMBER

The Prime Minister is due to meet a Sinn Féin delegation on 11 December. I understand that the delegation will comprise Gerry Adams MP, Martin McGuinness MP, Lucilita Bhreatnach, Martin Ferris, Siobhan O'Hanlon, Michelle Gildernew and Richard McAuley. My Secretary of State, Paul Murphy and Quentin Thomas will attend in support of the Prime Minister.

Key Messages

The Prime Minister will want to test Sinn Féin's commitment to peace. But Sinn Féin will also be wanting to establish whether the Prime Minister is committed to genuine negotiations and a process of radical change in Northern Ireland.

The key messages the Prime Minister should aim to convey are:

- * **peace and politics are the only way forward.**
- * **we are committed to radical change in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere.**
The status quo is not an option.
- * **we are committed to genuine negotiations, will continue to press Trimble;**

* **want to help you if you are committed to peace.**

Sinn Féin's Agenda

In recent days, Sinn Féin have expressed extreme anxiety about reaching any preliminary agreement before Christmas which appears to endorse partition. Although McGuinness recently said in public that there would not be a united Ireland in May, they (like other parties) are worried about extremist criticism over Christmas.

The meeting takes place amidst concerns that the IRA may be planning a return to violence. Assuming that the leadership are still committed to the political negotiations - and they continue to give every indication that they are - Adams and McGuinness will therefore be looking for as much reassurance as possible from the Prime Minister.

On confidence building measures, there is some evidence from other reporting that these are now beginning to have a positive impact on republican thinking. Perversely, Mr Trimble's recent criticisms of HMG for making too many concessions to nationalists may help to convince the republican movement that HMG is serious. The Prime Minister can remind Sinn Féin of the measures that have been taken to date and emphasise our commitment to look for further measures as the situation allows.

A speaking note is at **Tab A**.

Sinn Féin will obviously want to use the meeting both as a publicity opportunity and as a forum to raise (again) a number of grievances. The most likely to come up are prisoner issues (including extraditions and the case of Roisin McAliskey), demilitarisation (on which we have a good story to tell), Bloody Sunday and Irish language. Briefing and lines to take on these and on other possible issues are attached at **Tabs B to J**. We have included some detailed briefing on prisoner issues and will leave it to you to decide how much to show to the Prime Minister.

Handling Issues

David Trimble suggested in a recent call that the Prime Minister should speak to the media after the meeting, in order to counter-balance the level of publicity given to Sinn Féin. An alternative would be to issue a short press release; I attach an outline draft (**Tab K**).

[Yours ever,]

[Ken]

W K LINDSAY

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**PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH SINN FÉIN
LINES TO TAKE & BRIEFING NOTES**

INDEX

	<i>Page</i>
Tab A Speaking Note	A-1
Tab B Key points to make on Security & Prisons	B-1
Tab C Bloody Sunday	C-1
Tab D Irish language	D-1
Tab E Police reform/disbandment & Community justice	E-1
Tab F Brian Nelson	F-1
Tab G Personal Protection for Sinn Féin	G-1
Tab H Allegations against Belfast City Council	H-1
Tab I Security Situation/Normalisation (detail)	I-1
Tab J Prisoner Issues (detail)	J-1
Key Confidence Points (Prisons)	J-1
Transfers from Great Britain to Northern Ireland	J-2
Repatriations to the Republic of Ireland	J-3
Balcombe Street Four	J-4
Life Sentences Review System	J-5
Changes to Permanent Leave Arrangements	J-6
Changes to Temporary Leave Arrangements	J-7
Irish Prisoners held in English Prisons	J-8
Time Served in US by Doherty & Smyth	J-10
Extraditions	J-11
Roisin McAliskey	J-12
Tab K Possible points to make in a Press Release	K-1

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TAB A

SPEAKING NOTE

- * Welcome Sinn Féin's continuing involvement in the talks.
- * Am dealing with Sinn Féin in **good faith**.
- * **Want to help you if you are committed to peace.**
- * **Peace and politics are the only way forward.**
- * We are **committed to radical reform** in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere. The status quo is not an option..
- * We are **committed to genuine negotiations**. We want the widest possible consensus, including Sinn Féin.
- * Hope we now see signs of **greater engagement in talks**, and the outline of an agreement becoming clearer.
- * Understand your frustration at **UUP's non-engagement**: will continue to press Trimble.
- * However, believe your focus on the need for direct engagement with the UUP may be a mistake - by elevating a symbolic issue into a totem you have played into the hands of the UUP. It would be better to build on the substantive point that both parties are contributing fully to the negotiations; and as the talks move deeper into substance the likelihood of direct engagement will increase anyway.

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- * Recognise the **importance of building confidence** within all sections of the community.
- * However, confidence building is a **two-way street**: Sinn Féin, like all the other parties, must do their bit to enhance confidence and trust both within and outwith the negotiations.
- * Have to reiterate: we are **treating you in all respects as a constitutional political party**. We **cannot however be indulgent of any conduct by the IRA that amounts to a violation of the ceasefire**.
- * Happy to discuss the key areas in which an agreement will be found. All elements are of course essential to the whole, but can we go through one by one?
 - * Provisions **safeguarding rights** and **addressing equality and justice issues**.
 - * **A constitutional understanding**: we are committed to the principle of consent in all its aspects, reflected in legislation.
 - * **A local institution**: all parties, except so far you, favour an Assembly of some kind in Northern Ireland, with executive and legislative powers at least in respect of economic and social matters.
 - * **A framework for co-operation in these two islands** governing the totality of relationships, including Northern Ireland;

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- * A **framework for North/South co-operation**: bringing together those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the South.

- * Standing **intergovernmental machinery between the British and Irish governments.**

SECURITY & PRISONERS - KEY POINTS TO MAKE

- * I am pleased that we have been able to take advantage of the reduced level of terrorist activity following the reinstatement of the IRA ceasefire in July, which is why we have greatly **reduced security** throughout NI.
- * Significant moves have been taken to reduce the impact of security measures on everyday life. There is now no routine daytime patrolling by the Army in support of RUC foot patrols in Belfast, Londonderry and elsewhere. Army patrols throughout Northern Ireland in support of the RUC are at half the level they were before the IRA ceasefire, 250 soldiers have returned to their base in England and helicopter activity has reduced by around one quarter.
- * Although some groups (such as CAC and LVF) have not declared cease-fires and continue to pose a threat and there are daily incidents of shootings, beatings, petrol bombings, bomb scares etc, many steps have been taken to return NI to normality. We will continue to respond swiftly and positively when the security situation allows.
- * Aware of the importance which you attach to the sensitive issue of **prisoners**.
- * Have already done a lot on this with early releases, repatriations & transfers, Christmas home leave, reduction of security classification etc
- * Dr Mowlam has clearly said that further movement on prisons matters including prisoner releases is not excluded. In particular, the construction of a peaceful and lasting settlement would provide opportunities to make progress in this and other areas.
- * Any changes to release arrangements must be justified and must not undermine community confidence in the criminal justice system or the political process

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Defensive lines on Observation Posts in South Armagh

- * Threat in area remains high. Chief Constable must make judgements based on information available to him.

- * Stage has not yet been reached when complete normalisation is possible - a number of installations in South Armagh must remain for time being, until threat reduces and disappears - look forward to day when this is possible. All have a role in achieving this.

BLOODY SUNDAY

- * The Government recognises that the events of 30 January 1972 in Londonderry still arouse great pain and sorrow. The Government has indicated a clear desire to address this issue. We deeply regret the loss of life.

- * Officials are examining the evidence presented to the previous Secretary of State by some of the relatives of those killed and that presented by the Irish Government. If there is new evidence the appropriate action will be taken.

- * No options have been ruled out but the material must be examined thoroughly first.

- * Mo Mowlam met the relatives of some of those killed at a lunch on 3 July , she told the families that she would examine the material make a statement as soon as possible, but that might take several months.

- * **[If pressed]** We do plan to inform the Irish Government and the relatives of our decision before we make an announcement.

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TAB D

IRISH LANGUAGE

- * Government recognises importance of the Irish language for many people in Northern Ireland as part of their cultural heritage

- * understand and welcome the fact that you will be meeting Tony Worthington next week (18 December) to discuss a set of proposals on education through the medium of Irish which was presented to Mo Mowlam a number of weeks ago

- * Government supporting efforts to create film production industry in Northern Ireland using EU and Lottery funds, for which Irish language film/programme makers can apply

- * UK and Irish officials are working with the broadcasters towards agreeing an implementation plan to extend the RTE signal within Northern Ireland. Along with RTE 1 and RTE 2 Teilifis na Gælige (the Irish Language Broadcasting channel) will also benefit from increased penetration of RTE in Northern Ireland.

- * **[if raised]** Government considering the implications of signing the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, which could enhance the status of Irish in Northern Ireland.

D-1

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POLICE REFORM/DISBANDMENT & COMMUNITY JUSTICE

- * There is work to be done to make the RUC more efficient, more effective, more accountable, and more acceptable especially in the Nationalist community. The Police (Northern Ireland) Bill currently in Parliament is an important step in achieving these aims.

- * Disbanding the RUC is not on the Government's agenda.

Community Justice

If raised: express interest, but without any commitment.

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TAB F

BRIAN NELSON

- * Nelson was arrested and charged with serious crimes and was sentenced accordingly.
- * Nelson has served his sentence and has been released on parole.

Request for Independent Inquiry

- * Matter was fully investigated at the time - not convinced a further investigation would add anything.

Background Note

1. The decision to arrest Nelson (in 1990) was taken by Mr John Stevens (the Deputy Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire) and his enquiry team. Mr Stevens was conducting a rigorous investigation into allegations of collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and members of the security forces, at the request of the RUC Chief Constable. Nelson was charged and convicted of a number of very serious crimes (including five counts of conspiracy to murder). It would have been quite wrong to have turned a blind eye to illegality, whatever the cost to the intelligence system. There can be no blanket immunity from prosecution for informants who commit crimes.
2. The trial judge in the Nelson case recognised that there is a difficult dividing line between lawful participation within a terrorist organisation as a security force informer, and active engagement in terrorism. In the judge's view, Nelson crossed over that line.

F-1

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PERSONAL PROTECTION FOR SINN FÉIN - INVOLVEMENT OF RUC

- * Understand that Adam Ingram wrote to Alex Maskey yesterday [Wed] about this matter.
- * The involvement of the RUC to undertake these surveys is long-standing practice which applies to all persons protected under the scheme regardless of their background. Such surveys are crucial to enable the RUC to identify the particular measures which the householder requires to afford him or her adequate protection.
- * The Government has a responsibility to ensure the best possible advice has been obtained about the security measures necessary. The RUC have unique knowledge and expertise in these matters which is not available from other sources.
- * Totally reject the suggestion that the information gained by the RUC might be passed on to Loyalist terrorist group. This is unfounded.
- * Government will always consider verbal or written representations that this work should be done by someone else, but not satisfied at present that anyone else can do as good a job.
- * Would encourage Sinn Fein to think again about their rejection of RUC assistance. Lives may be at risk. RUC involvement is crucial and for their benefit.

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

- * Any decision on nominations to represent Belfast City Council on outside bodies is a matter for the Council itself.

- * HMG adheres to the Code of Practice for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland and is committed to the principle of selection on merit.

- * Where the decision on appointments rests with Ministers, generally the practice is to seek, on merit, a representation which reflects the composition of the population of Northern Ireland in terms of community background, gender and ethnic origin.

- * Increasingly appointments for public bodies are being advertised in the local press in addition to seeking nominations directly from Councils; this affords individuals the opportunity to express interest in membership of public bodies in their own right.

- * The Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland plans to produce guidance for nominating bodies shortly, emphasising the principles underlying the appointment procedures - particularly openness, transparency and appointment on merit.

SECURITY SITUATION/NORMALISATION (DETAIL)

Summary of Changes

The net effects of the changes are:

- Fewer soldiers in the Province.
- Military support to routine RUC patrols across Northern Ireland reduced by a half.
- No routine day time Army patrolling in Belfast in support of RUC foot patrols.
- Less intrusive security furniture.
- Greater freedom of movement for traffic throughout Northern Ireland.

Changes introduced during previous ceasefire not reversed

- The opening of 104 border roads previously closed.
- Closure and demolition of Army bases at North Howard Street, Kilturk, Clady, Buncrana Road and St Angelo.
- Disbandment of Belfast Civilian Search Unit.
- Removal of vast majority of vehicle control zones.
- Removal of Army sangars at Chapel St/Church St Cookstown.
- Re-opening of Londonderry city walls to the public.
- Road furniture and ramps removed from Ballygomartin Road, RUC Donegall Pass, RUC Oldpark, Hump PVCP and all Fermanagh patrol bases.

Changes introduced during this ceasefire

July

- Wearing of body armour no longer mandatory.
- Carrying of long arms restricted.
- Increased use of liveried vehicles.
- Military support withdrawn from south and east Belfast, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey.

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- Military support for RUC in Belfast city centre withdrawn.
- Saxon armoured vehicles withdrawn from use.
- Security gates in Belfast opened.
- Single vehicle police patrolling resumes in North Region.
- Military escort vehicles withdrawn in North region.
- Reduction in military patrolling in both urban and rural areas, North Region.
- Additional neighbourhood police patrols.
- Security around Ardmore RUC station reduced.
- Checking at PVCs in Bessbrook relaxed.
- Fewer military personnel required to support RUC in South Region.
- Single vehicle patrols introduced in South Region.
- Town centre barriers opened in Armagh, Portadown, Lurgan, Banbridge and Newtownards.

August

- Military vehicle support for foot patrols withdrawn - Lower Falls.
- Military foot patrols reduced in number - Lower Falls.
- Reduction in military foot patrolling north and west Belfast during darkness.
- Number of foot patrols over 24 hour period in west Belfast reduced.
- Military escorts for RUC mobiles reduced to single vehicle in west Belfast.
- Barriers at High St and Convent Hill Bessbrook opened 12 hours per day.
- Helicopter activity at Bessbrook reduced.
- Military support for RUC foot patrols in Newry town centre withdrawn.
- Army exchange wearing of helmets for berets.

September

- Military patrols from New Barnsley and Springfield Road reduced.
- Police only foot patrols introduced into Woodbourne sub-division.
- No night time military foot patrols from Springfield Road.
- Army announce intention to close Kilkeel base.
- Military support for RUC in Londonderry city centre withdrawn.

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October

- Bishop's Gate Londonderry re-opened to one way traffic.

November

- 250 Soldiers of Parachute Regiment re-located to mainland.
- No routine military support provided to daylight police foot patrols in West Belfast.
- Permanent barriers at Strand Road RUC station removed.

December

- Army announce intention to close Rockwood base.
- RUC begin work to remove permanent vehicle checkpoint near the border crossing outside Newry.
- No routine military support provided to daylight foot patrols in North Belfast.
- Minor road in Clogher re-opened to traffic.

PRISONER ISSUES (DETAIL)

KEY CONFIDENCE POINTS

- * Since November 1995 some 240 prisoners have been released early under the Remission of Sentences Act.
- * About 50 prisoners from the Maze receive compassionate temporary release every month.
- * We expect about a third of all sentenced prisoners to receive Christmas home leave.
- * No outstanding applications from republican prisoners held in Great Britain for transfer to Northern Ireland.
- * Prisoners on temporary transfer to Northern Ireland are eligible for temporary release under local arrangements.
- * Most transferred republican prisoners have already taken periods of temporary release and will receive 10 days Christmas Home Leave.
- * 9 republican prisoners have already been repatriated to the Republic of Ireland.
- * The Home Secretary approved the application for repatriation from Donnelly on 5 December.
- * Further cases are under consideration by the two Governments.
- * No republican prisoners are held in SSUs.
- * So that reviews of life sentence cases take account of the changed circumstances of the cease-fires, no case will be knocked back for more than 3 years.

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TRANSFERS FROM GREAT BRITAIN TO NORTHERN IRELAND

- * There are currently no applications by republican prisoners for transfer to Northern Ireland outstanding.

- * Patrick Martin, who was the only outstanding case, was told on 5 December that the Home Secretary had agreed to grant him a restricted transfer to Northern Ireland.

- * Prisoners granted restricted transfers to Northern Ireland are eligible to apply for temporary release under local rules; all except two republican prisoners have already taken periods of temporary release.

Background Note

1. Since new arrangements were introduced in 1992 15 terrorist prisoners have been granted temporary transfer to Northern Ireland (13 republican and 2 loyalist). Martin will raise this number to 16. During the same period 14 terrorist prisoners have been granted unrestricted transfers.

2. A prisoner will generally be granted an unrestricted transfer unless the effect would be to significantly reduce the period he is required to serve in custody. In such circumstances he will be granted a restricted transfer which means that ultimate release remains the responsibility of the sending jurisdiction.

3. The two prisoners who have not received temporary release are McNulty and Jack. They do not meet the criteria for any of the pre-release temporary release schemes.

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REPATRIATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

- * 9 republican prisoners have now been repatriated to the Republic of Ireland (Hayes, Woods and Denis Kinsella were repatriated last week).
- * The application by Donnelly has now been agreed and he will transfer shortly.
- * Of the outstanding cases 7 are with the Home Office for decision; however, no final decision can be made in these cases until the Irish Government passes further legislation to allow the enforcement of their sentences; 3 cases are with the Irish Government and 4 cases (the Balcombe Street gang) have yet to be passed to the Irish Government; 1 case (John Kinsella) has been suspended as the prisoner has appealed against his conviction.

Background Note

1. Donnelly was told on Friday 5 December that his application had been approved.
2. Final decisions in the cases currently with the Home Office have not been made because the sentences being served in each case are longer than is available for the equivalent offence in the Republic of Ireland (with the effect that their sentences could not be enforced following repatriation). The Irish Government has undertaken to pass legislation allowing for their Courts to make orders to enforce such sentences.
3. Tariffs have yet to be announced for the Balcombe Street gang (see separate briefing note) and have now been delayed because of representations from O'Connell. Until tariffs are set and announced the cases cannot be referred to the Irish.

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BALCOMBE STREET FOUR

- * The so-called Balcombe Street gang were convicted of a series of horrific offences.
- * They were eventually convicted of six counts of murder and one of manslaughter, as well as numerous other offences and received a total of 47 sentences between them.
- * Tariffs were not set at the time of the convictions. However, present policy is to set tariffs in all cases.
- * Aware that tariffs are required in these four cases before their repatriations applications can be processed further.
- * Currently giving careful attention to the tariffs appropriate, in all the circumstances, to the offences committed and to the formal representations (received on 2 December) on behalf of Martin O'Connell which will delay the announcement of the outcome for some weeks. All four had previously declined to make any representations about tariff.

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LIFE SENTENCE REVIEWS

Reduction to maximum of 3 year deferral

- * Dr Mowlam announced on 27 October that in future the maximum period for which a case may be deferred for further consideration by the Life Sentence Review Board was to be reduced from five years to three years. This change, which will apply to all future cases, will ensure that cases are kept under more frequent review. Significant changes in the security situation can therefore be factored in to individual decisions more easily.

- * The time that a prisoner will serve will continue to reflect the need to punish the offender, to deter the offender and others, and to protect the public from the risk of re-offending.

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CHANGES TO PERMANENT RELEASE ARRANGEMENTS

- * More than 240 terrorist prisoners have already been released under legislation introduced in 1995 in response to the cease-fires.
- * We stand ready to consider further concerns raised with us as part of the democratic process.
- * Further developments will be easier as the community at large gains confidence in that process.
- * Will not speculate at this time about further changes.

Background Note

The issue of prisoner releases in the context of a political settlement remains under consideration by the Northern Ireland Office in consultation with the Home Office.

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CHANGES TO TEMPORARY RELEASE ARRANGEMENTS

- * There have been a number of important changes over the past three years.
- * The range of circumstances in which compassionate temporary release will be granted has been **extended**; in addition there is no longer a time-served qualifying period and the maximum period of leave for funerals is now 72 hours.
- * About **50 applications** from paramilitary prisoners at Maze for compassionate temporary release are **granted each month** (there are about 420 sentenced prisoners at the Maze).
- * **Christmas leave has been extended to 10 days** for all prisoners and the qualifying period reduced; the 10-day allowance has been extended in a similar manner.
- * **More than a third of all sentenced prisoners will be granted 10 days Christmas Home Leave this year**; more than 160 paramilitary prisoners at the Maze have already had their applications for Christmas Home Leave approved.
- * The **number of days of pre-release leave** for prisoners serving longer sentences has been **significantly increased**.

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IRISH PRISONERS HELD IN ENGLISH PRISONS

- * No republican prisoners held in SSUs.
- * Irish Republican prisoners who were Category A Exceptional Escape Risk were downgraded in August to Category A High Risk.
- * The five Irish Republican prisoners held on remand at Belmarsh are due to stand trial at the Central Criminal Court in the near future. High risk prisoners awaiting trial in London are held at Belmarsh prison.
- * Prior to their downgrading the five remand prisoners occupied one spur of a building within Belmarsh prison which was run as a special secure unit in accordance with the SSU Operating Standards. The three other spurs of the building were occupied by high risk prisoners.
- * The five prisoners now share a spur with other high risk prisoners and are subject to the local security restrictions imposed on all high risk prisoners at Belmarsh.
- * There has been **no deterioration** in the conditions of detention for the five republican prisoners currently held at Belmarsh. The restrictions placed on the five prisoners have been reduced since they were downgraded from exceptional risk to high risk. The prisoners are now **treated the same as all other high risk prisoners** at Belmarsh.
- * As high risk prisoners, the five are **no longer subject to closed visits** and have started to have **family and other visits under open conditions**. The five are also able to mix with a greater number of prisoners.

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- * Concerns regarding the regime have been carefully considered. Full searches are carried out in specific circumstances and in accordance with national instructions.

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TIME SERVED IN US BY DOHERTY AND SMYTH

- * The Secretary of State will decide shortly whether or not to give Smyth credit for any of the period during which he was unlawfully at large following his escape from the Maze prison in 1983.
- * She has received a number of representations regarding this case and that of Joseph Doherty and will give consideration to those representations in making her decision.
- * The decision not to credit Joseph Doherty with the time he spent in custody in the United States fighting extradition and deportation proceedings was made by the previous Secretary of State on the basis of the general policy that time spent by convicted fugitives abroad evading justice will not as a rule be credited against their sentence.
- * The previous Secretary of State did indicate that the period served in custody in the United States could be taken into account by the life sentence review board, but did not agree that he should receive an early review by the Board.
- * Both Mr Doherty and the authorities in the United States were made aware of this policy prior to his deportation and the decision will not be set aside at this time.

Background Note

1. There is evidence of a concerted campaign on behalf of Joseph Doherty to persuade the Secretary of State to re-visit the decision that he should not receive credit against his determinate sentence for the time he spent in custody in the United States. This decision was challenged but upheld on judicial review.
2. We are giving further consideration to this application on the basis of decisions by the Home Office to grant credit to two prisoners in similar circumstances.

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EXTRADITION/DEPORTATION

- * Individual cases are for the Courts to decide but it is the general policy of the Government to seek to return to justice those who attempt to flee or escape.
- * It is the Government's policy to seek to ensure that extradition arrangements with other countries are effective and workable.
- * Deportation of illegal immigrants is a matter for individual states HMG has no locus or desire to become involved in these.
- * Terrorists' ability to claim political offence as a defence have been greatly reduced by under the 1986 UK/US Supplementary Treaty and the 1994 amendment to the Irish Extradition legislation.
- * ***[if pressed on whether HMG is seeking Kelly's extradition]*** It is our policy not to comment on whether warrants have been issued in specific cases.

Background note

1. There are a number of high profile extradition cases with the Courts at the moment: Artt, Brennan and Kirby are all Maze escapees in California. The District Judge announced on 11 August that the three should be extradited: they have indicated that they will appeal. Kelly and McNally are also Maze escapees and are known to be in the Republic of Ireland. The District Court ordered that McNally be extradited; he is on bail pending appeal. A warrant was issued for Kelly's extradition and he was arrested on 22 October.
2. There are nine Irish deportation cases currently ongoing in the United States. Six of these have been suspended in recognition of the IRA cease-fire. A decision on the remaining three has not yet been taken.

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ROISIN McALISKEY

- * Roisin McAliskey was arrested for the purpose of extradition on 26 November 1996.
- * The German authorities are seeking her return from the United Kingdom to face charges relating to the Osnabruck bomb attack in 1996. The request is now under consideration by the UK courts, and there are a number of routes of appeal open to her.
- * There is a hearing this Friday (12 December) which may lead to a decision on committal. At that stage, the case may be put before the Home Secretary or there are further legal avenues of appeal

Delay?

- * Ms McAliskey will have opportunity to make representations against her return to the Home Secretary before he takes a decision. The Home Secretary's decision is governed by the safeguards contained in the Extradition Act 1989.
- * There has been some delay in the court proceedings: first, because of the birth of her child, and secondly, because the magistrate has taken great care to establish whether she is well enough to attend the committal proceedings.

Latest Developments (if raised by Sinn Féin)

- * The Home Secretary has received a formal set of representations from Ms McAliskey's solicitors asking him to review the original order to proceed in this case. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Home Secretary is considering his response.

POSSIBLE POINTS TO MAKE IN A PRESS RELEASE

The Prime Minister met representatives of Sinn Féin as part of an ongoing series of meetings with the parties involved in the talks. The Prime Minister repeated that he had always wanted an inclusive and that he was pleased that, because of the IRA ceasefire and their commitment to the Mitchell principles, Sinn Féin were now engaged in the process. He wanted them to remain part of the process. That, of course, means that the IRA ceasefire must remain in place and Sinn Féin must continue to be committed to the Mitchell principles.

The Prime Minister reaffirmed the Government's commitment to the talks process and to trying to find a negotiated settlement by May, firmly founded on the principle of consent. The Prime Minister welcomed the recent intensification of the process and the fact that this week progress had been made towards agreement among the parties on the key issues to be discussed and the format for the talks in the New Year.

The Prime Minister also reminded Sinn Féin of the Government's commitment to taking measures to enhance confidence in all parts of the community and reminded them of some of the things which had been done recently.

There was also a useful discussion of the themes emerging in the negotiations and how these might indicate an eventual settlement.