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FROM: **BILL JEFFREY**
Political Director
24 June 1998
BJ/MR/469

ASST/
SEC
20 JUN 1998
C.C.R.U.

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PS/SECRETARY OF STATE(L&B) cc See distribution list

SATURDAY'S PRESS CONFERENCE

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File

Issue:

The shape of the event which the Secretary of State plans for Saturday, to coincide with the final election results.

Timing:

For an early discussion on the Secretary of State's return - you were thinking of Friday morning.

Recommendation:

The Secretary of State is invited:

- *to agree the proposed coverage and main messages of the press conference;*
- *to note the first draft of her introductory statement and comment on it if she wishes;*
- *to give a steer on the points noted in paragraph 5 below.*

Discussion:

We are still on course for a substantial Press Conference on Saturday.
Mr Murphy talked it over with a few of us yesterday, and what follows reflects that discussion.

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2. The closer we get to the event, the more Mr Murphy, Tom Kelly and I think it is inevitable that the focus will be on the election and its implications, with Drumcree perhaps already beginning to move up the agenda. We think that, in addition to giving an immediate reaction to the election results, the Secretary of State's main messages on Saturday should be:

- **continuity** - Ministers continuing to govern for the good of Northern Ireland, across the whole range of economic and social issues;
- **co-operation** with the newly elected representatives to achieve a smooth transition;
- **implementation** of the Agreement - moving ahead on all fronts, with the Government playing its full part.

3. The coverage of the Secretary of State's introductory statement will need to be quite carefully balanced. If we get it right, it could be the kind of text that the Irish Times, for example, might publish more or less in full, and which would be read carefully by Northern Ireland watchers from all political angles. We think it should include references to:

- The **first meeting of the Assembly**, as the logical next step;
- **continuing good government**, looking forward to a few specific early announcements e.g. on waste disposal and water, unless (see below) the Secretary of State decides actually to make one of these announcements on the day;
- the inclusive consultative approach to **relations with the newly elected representatives** - again with a couple of examples of areas for consultation;

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- the importance of progress on North/South bodies and how we intend to pursue this;
- East/West developments as the third part of the institutional jigsaw, including an indication that we are planning for a first meeting of the British Irish Council in the Autumn;
- Victims - looking forward to an announcement by Mr Ingram on Monday;
- the signing of the Decommissioning Orders by both Governments on Monday;
- the Policing Commission as work in progress;
- the Criminal Justice Review - linked to a separate Press Notice announcing the names of the independent assessors and giving fuller details;
- the Sentences Bill - as another example of work in progress - Bill in Parliament, plans to appoint Review Body soon (again see below);
- Rights, including a reference to the Equality White Paper and (subject to a meeting you are having on Friday) perhaps an announcement on the statutory obligation on public bodies and the merger of existing advisory bodies into an Equality Commission;
- Irish language;

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- the introduction before long of the Northern Ireland Bill to implement all those parts of the Agreement which require legislation.

- 4. I attach a first draft - largely the work of Mr Keown - which still needs some editing, but gives a flavour of how such a statement could come out.

- 5. Could I add a few points of amplification, on which it would be useful to have a steer from the Secretary of State:
 - We are on course for a substantive announcement on the Criminal Justice Review. You will receive separate material from Jim Daniell. He has taken the Irish through the names, and I will also be ready to discuss them with Dermot Gallagher when I see him tomorrow morning. The Irish reaction was reasonably favourable, although they suggested some new names. Jim would now like to consult the UUP, the SDLP and Sinn Féin (if he can reach them in the thick of the election period), and it would be helpful to know if the Secretary of State agrees that he should do this later tomorrow or on Friday;

 - The statement should include a good reference to prisoner releases and the Sentences Bill as part of the Agreement, but it will, I am afraid, be too early to name the members of the Sentence Review Body. The composition of the Body was the subject of amendments in the Commons, and could well be in the Lords. The preferred approach of joint chairmen requires an amendment to the Bill which will need to be made in the Lords. In short, we could be made to look pretty foolish (or at least presumptuous) if we announced names in advance of the Lords stages. The better course, we think, is to look towards an announcement as soon as the Bill is through Parliament.

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- One of the matters of keenest interest after the elections will be the timing of the creation of the new Executive. The Secretary of State can expect to be asked whether she shares Mr Trimble's desire for delay or the SDLP/Sinn Féin view that the Executive should be formed as soon as possible. The Press Conference would be an opportunity, if she wished, to indicate that she expects the shadow Executive to be established by early September. She could do so by reference to the end October date for agreement on North/South bodies in the shadow Ministerial Council. There is something to be said for getting this into the open, if only to allay gathering fears in Nationalist circles and among the Irish that Ministers are ready to indulge Mr Trimble by letting the creation of the Executive slip indefinitely. On the other hand, the Secretary of State may not want to put herself so clearly at odds with Mr Trimble immediately after the election.

- In the light of what the Secretary of State said before she went on holiday, I have teed up DOE to be ready to make a statement on waste management as part of Saturday's event. But as things are coming out, Mr Murphy, Tom Kelly and I all feel that it might look a bit contrived to have a substantive announcement of this kind in the midst of the other more political material. The alternative approach, which we favour, would be to mention this as one of the announcements to be expected soon as an aspect of continuing good government. Does the Secretary of State agree?

- A suggestion which emerged in our discussion with Mr Murphy was that, after the Secretary of State had spoken, the junior Ministers could each say something about plans for consultation with local politicians in their areas of departmental responsibility, majoring on existing strategic initiatives - the health strategy (Mr Worthington), the economic strategy (Mr Murphy) and the "Shaping the Future" strategy (Lord Dubs).

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These could be very short presentations - a few minutes each. Drafts are being prepared. Is the Secretary of State attracted by this approach? It may not excite much press interest, but could give a good signal.

6. Detailed notes for use in dealing with Supplementary Questions are being prepared, and will be submitted separately nearer the time. We will also give you a letter to send to John Holmes.

(Signed)

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