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mg CENT SEC

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FROM: MRS DOREEN BROWN  
CENT SEC

DATE: 16 APRIL 1996

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1. Mr. T...  
2. Mr. D...  
3. Mr. Mac...  
4. Mrs. H...  
5. Basil ...



NI PERMANENT SECRETARIES  
PRIVATE OFFICES  
DEPARTMENTAL CO-ORDINATORS

cc Mr. H...  
Mr. Robinson  
Mr. Wallace  
Mr. Gibson  
Mr. McDonnell  
Mr. McConnell  
Mr. Henderson  
Mr. Buckland  
MC - Private Offi  
Ince...

ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT - CENTRAL SECRETARIAT CIRCULAR 1/91

GOVERNMENT CONTACTS WITH SINN FEIN

Departments were provided on 26 June 1995 with revised guidance on Government contacts with Sinn Fein, Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP). This guidance should continue to be applied in respect of contacts with the PUP and UDP.

However, following the end of the IRA ceasefire on 9 February, the guidance on contact between Sinn Fein and NIO Ministers and officials has been revised. This new guidance (copy attached) should be applied by departments until further notice.

As in the past, it will be for departments to bring the attached guidance on contacts with Sinn Fein to the attention of appropriate staff, bearing in mind the sensitivity of the issue. Non-departmental Public Bodies should be made aware of the revised policy and practice in this area and their own practice (subject to any particular statutory duties or practical operational requirements) should reflect the same principles as set out in the attached guidance.

Any points of difficulty in applying the attached revised guidance should be raised with Central Secretariat ((5)28153) or CPL (0171 210 6575 or 6576).

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GUIDELINES FOR CONTACTS WITH SINN FEIN

In the absence of an IRA ceasefire, contact between Sinn Fein and NIO Ministers and officials will be circumscribed as follows:

- a. Ministers will not meet with an exclusively Sinn Fein delegation in any circumstances nor will they meet, on Government property, a delegation or group which includes Sinn Fein representatives.

Ministers will be free to meet (away from Government property) groups which include Sinn Fein. This reduces the permitted Ministerial contact which Sinn Fein enjoyed during the ceasefire period. The denial of Ministerial contact with Sinn Fein as a party is in line with the policy of the Irish Government at present.

- b. Ministers will continue their outside visits in Northern Ireland on the understanding that any contacts with Sinn Fein will be incidental to the primary purpose of the visit. For example, visits to District Councils can proceed, given that their main purpose is to discuss Council business rather than meet Sinn Fein as a party.
- c. Meetings between Sinn Fein and senior officials may take place with the explicit approval of the appropriate Departmental Minister. In cases of doubt, advice should be sought from CPL, Central Secretariat and PAB.

Ministerial approval is necessary because Ministers have to be accountable to Parliament and able to confirm that they gave their agreement to such meetings. This approval could be generic or cover a series of meetings in appropriate circumstances.

Every case for consideration, either a specific meeting or a series, should be regarded on its merits with no pre-disposition either for or against.

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NIO and Cent Sec officials will meet Sinn Fein on political matters at Sinn Fein's request, based on the merits of the case and with specific Ministerial approval, as a listening but not a negotiating exercise.

- d. Contact between Sinn Fein and junior officials on local constituency matters will continue as before.
- e. Sinn Fein should continue to receive Press Notices and other material sent to all political parties.
- f. In order to be consistent in treatment between contacts by letter and personal contacts, Departments should ensure that letters from Sinn Fein elected representatives, party officers and unelected spokespersons addressed to Ministers receive a Private Secretary not a Ministerial reply.

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