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cc Linda  
Robert  
hara  
Brian.

n/6/97  
Sub/00616/97  
mc Cent Sec  
Sinn Fein

FROM: MRS DOREEN BROWN  
CENTRAL SECRETARIAT

cc

PS/Attorney General

PS/PUS (B&L)

- O

Mr Thomas

- O

DATE: 16 JUNE 1997

Mr Steele

- O

Mr Bell

- O

Mr Blackwell

- O

Mr Leach

- O

Mr Shannon

Mr Brooker

- O

Mr Hill

- O

Mr Wood

- O

Mr Steele, NIAO

Parliamentary Section

Mrs Rogers

- O

NI PERMANENT SECRETARIES  
DEPARTMENTAL CO-ORDINATORS  
**PRIVATE OFFICES**



**ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT: CENTRAL SECRETARIAT CIRCULAR**

1. Departments were provided, on 16 April 1996, with revised guidance on contact with Sinn Fein.
2. Sinn Fein's recent success in the General Election and Local Government Elections may give rise to an increase in the number of occasions when Sinn Fein representatives seek to raise issues with Departments, at Ministerial or official level. We also need to consider how to handle issues such as the circulation of official documents eg legislation.
3. The attached guidance **replaces** that issued in April 1996. It deals in general terms with a number of issues and should be applied by Departments until further notice.
4. As in the past, Departments should bring this guidance to the attention of appropriate staff, bearing in mind the sensitivity of the issue. Non-Departmental Public Bodies should also be made aware of the revised guidance and their own practice (subject to

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any particular statutory duties or practical operational requirements) should reflect the same principles as set out in the attached guidance.

5. Departments should consult Central Secretariat ((5)28153/(5)28158/(5)28168) on any points of difficulty. Central Secretariat will consult Political Affairs Division (PAB) and Constitutional and Political Division (CPL), NIO as necessary.

[Signed: DAB]

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- (a) Ministers will not meet with a Sinn Féin elected representative or an exclusively Sinn Féin delegation in any circumstances nor will they meet, on Government property, a delegation or group which includes Sinn Féin representatives. This reduces the permitted Ministerial contact which Sinn Féin enjoyed during the ceasefire period.
  - (b) Ministers will continue their outside visits in Northern Ireland on the understanding that any contact with Sinn Féin will be incidental to the primary purpose of the visit. For example, visits to District Councils in Northern Ireland will proceed, given that their main purpose is to discuss Council business rather than meet Sinn Féin as a party, and social contact with Sinn Féin as a party is avoided.
  - (c) Meetings between Sinn Féin and senior officials to discuss policy issues may take place with the explicit approval of the appropriate Departmental Minister. In case of doubt, advice should be sought from Central Secretariat ((5)28153/28158/28168), who will consult PAB and CPL.
- 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 general 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.
- (d) Contact between Sinn Féin and junior officials on purely constituency matters will continue, as before to avoid any accusation of disenfranchising the Sinn Féin electorate.

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## GUIDELINES FOR CONTACT WITH SINN FEIN

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

- (a) Ministers will not meet with a Sinn Fein elected representative or an exclusively Sinn Fein delegation in any circumstances nor will they meet, on Government property, a delegation or group which includes Sinn Fein representatives. This reduces the permitted Ministerial contact which Sinn Fein enjoyed during the ceasefire period.
- (b) Ministers will continue their outside visits in Northern Ireland on the understanding that any contact with Sinn Fein will be incidental to the primary purpose of the visit. For example, visits to District Councils in Northern Ireland will proceed, given that their main purpose is to discuss Council business rather than meet Sinn Fein as a party, and social contact with Sinn Fein as a party is avoided.
- (c) Meetings between Sinn Fein and senior officials to discuss policy issues may take place with the explicit approval of the appropriate Departmental Minister. In case of doubt, advice should be sought from Central Secretariat (5)28153/28158/28168), who will consult PAB and CPL.

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.

- (d) Contact between Sinn Fein and junior officials on purely constituency matters will continue as before to avoid any accusation of disenfranchising the Sinn Fein electorate.

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- (e) Sinn Fein should continue to receive Press Notices and other material sent to all political parties in Northern Ireland including draft legislative proposals. In this case separate copies should be sent to Messers Adams and McGuinness who are entitled to use "MP" after their name. Letters signed by Ministers intended to go to all parties or party leaders should receive a Private Secretary signature in the case of Sinn Fein. In all cases, correspondence should be addressed to Sinn Fein Headquarters.
- (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 or official and not a Ministerial reply.
- (g) Sinn Fein representatives should not normally be invited to receptions, dinners or other social gatherings. However, there may be other occasions when it might be appropriate to extend invitations to elected Sinn Fein representatives. In all cases, Departments should contact Central Secretariat for advice before issuing such invitations.

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