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MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE TAOISEACH
DATED 10 AUGUST 1972

Thank you very much for your message of 1 August. Your Ambassador will have reported the conversation which he and I had that evening. Subsequently Mr Whitelaw was able to have a very helpful discussion with Dr Hillery, and he will no doubt have told you about that.

It is certainly our wish and our intention that the military steps we were recently obliged to take should quickly be followed by political measures. We have always emphasised that the problem will not be solved by military means alone.

As you will know, Mr Whitelaw has now held two meetings with the SDLP members: the discussion is to be resumed on Friday. We hope that they will agree to take part in the conference which we plan to hold as soon as possible.

Mr Whitelaw expects to announce the arrangements for this conference very shortly. As he explained to Dr Hillery last week, we think that the political parties in Northern Ireland should be given the opportunity of working out their own solution of the long term problem. I am convinced that it is an important condition of success that the Northern Ireland parties should have an understanding of each other's points of view. The

proposal is therefore to limit the conference to the Northern Ireland parties (which, of course, involves the exclusion of our own political parties in the rest of the United Kingdom).

This, however, should not prevent us from keeping in the closest touch on all these matters. I very much hope that by one means and another we shall be able to maintain contact over all these problems as the solutions develop, as is our hope, over the next few months. It is better, I feel sure you will understand, that these contacts should be confidential (though they need not necessarily be secretive) between your Government and ours. I fully recognise that you have a contribution to make in the search for a solution and I should be anxious that your viewpoint should be in the minds of those attending the conference.

As I said in a speech last November, if the majority of the people in the North want Northern Ireland to become part of a United Ireland, I do not believe that any United Kingdom Government is going to want to stand in their way. The door is certainly not locked and we do not want to lock it: but it must be for the people of Northern Ireland to decide whether and when they want to come through it.

I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your actions against the Provisional IRA. I hope that we can act in this matter in close co-operation. Mr Whitelaw has looked into the problem of licenced weapons held in Northern Ireland other than shotguns and small bore weapons. We have it in mind to take a number of measures. An appeal is to be made to the public to surrender arms and ammunition to the Police who will take possession of them without further question: the number of registered firearms dealers is to be reduced: and facilities will be provided by the Security Forces for competition rifles to be held securely in armouries. These measures should help considerably.

Finally, I can assure you that it is our firm intention that there should be no discrimination as between the communities when it comes to measures to keep violence in check. Above all the military measures that we have had to take have been designed to help the minority to get the IRA off their backs.

EDWARD HEATH