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Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

16 May, 1991.

The Rt. Hon. John Major, M.P.,
Prime Minister.

Dear John,

I very much appreciated the message which you sent me last night and your generous words about the efforts of Gerry Collins, in co-operation with Peter Brooke, to finalise the basis on which the three strands of talks would begin. For our part, we are very conscious of, and would like to pay tribute to, the patient and painstaking efforts of Peter Brooke over past weeks to move the process forward.

I note from your message that, following your meeting with the Unionist leaders yesterday afternoon, they have accepted that the opening plenary meeting of strand 2 of the proposed talks would be held in London, that the bulk of substantive exchanges in strand 2 would be held in Northern Ireland and that a plenary meeting of the strand 2 discussions would be held in Dublin towards the end of June but that they also indicated that they could not give full agreement to the document until the location of the talks in Northern Ireland had been settled and the name of the Chairman has been agreed.

I very much hope that we can get agreement on these remaining issues so that the talks in strand 1 can begin as soon as possible and that thereafter we can proceed to strands 2 and 3 on the basis indicated in Peter Brooke's statement in the House of Commons on 26 March.

I am therefore asking my officials who will be meeting officials of the Northern Ireland Office in the Liaison Group in Dublin today to begin at once to explore the names of possible Chairmen and to see what suggestions you on your side would have about a location for the bulk of the strand 2 talks which are to be held in Northern Ireland. I attach particular importance to identifying a Chairman who will have the qualities necessary for what will undoubtedly be a difficult and demanding job. For our part, we are very flexible on the question of specific location; however, I know this is a sensitive issue for the Northern parties and we will both obviously wish to take their views into account.

Thank you again for having communicated with me so promptly last evening. I very much agree that we should remain in close touch as the talks continue and I look forward at an early date to having a substantial meeting with you, as discussed when we met in Luxembourg in early April.

Yours sincerely,



Taoiseach.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO MR CHARLES HAUGHEY TD

I have been taking, as I know you have, a close interest in the Northern Ireland political talks. I very much appreciate the ready and constructive response which you and your colleagues have given to the various issues which have arisen. Peter Brooke and Gerry Collins had a most useful meeting last week.

As you know, Peter and I saw the Unionist leaders today, at their request.

The Unionist leaders had a number of concerns. They wanted clarification that the paper which Peter Brooke circulated to party leaders on 14 May applied to the talks in Strands Two and Three and not to Strand One. I was able to confirm this.

They also wanted an assurance that the appointment of an independent chairman did not mean that the issues in Strand Two would be open to international adjudication. I was able to give them that assurance.

Mr Molyneux and Mr Paisley went on to say that they wanted to be consulted about the independent chairman before he was appointed and to be satisfied on the standing orders under which he would operate. They did not envisage the standing orders being a matter of controversy. I was able to assure them that they would of course be consulted about the independent chairman as set out in paragraph three of the paper.

The Unionist leaders accepted that the opening plenary meeting of Strand Two would be held in London, that the bulk of substantive exchanges in Strand Two would be held in Northern Ireland and that a plenary meeting of the Strand Two discussions would be held in Dublin towards the end of June. They indicated that they could not give full agreement to the document until the location of the

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talks in Northern Ireland had been settled and until the name of the chairman had been agreed but they said they were willing to go ahead with the talks and, as they put it, "to work the procedure" set out in the 14 May document.

I realise the difficulties that have been caused for the other participants in the talks by the obstacles that have been raised by the Unionist leaders, particularly when the others had accepted the document without difficulty. But I felt it important to explore whether the Unionist objections were substantial road blocks to future progress or whether we could find a way through. I am arranging for you to get straightaway the text of what Peter Brooke said publicly immediately after the talks which sets out precisely what transpired. I hope you and the other participants will agree that the position reached today is consistent with the agreements that Peter Brooke reached with Gerry Collins last Friday and that we have a sound basis on which the talks can go ahead as we all wish.

I look forward to remaining in close touch as the talks continue and to having a meeting with you as we discussed when we last met.

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