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**MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. MR JOHN MAJOR,
MP TO AN TAOISEACH, MR CHARLES HAUGHEY, TD, 13 MARCH 1991**

Dear Charlie,

I know that you have taken a great personal interest in the lengthy discussions which Peter Brooke, Gerry Collins and the leaders of the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland have been holding over the last fourteen months. I am grateful for the timely interventions by which you have, on several occasions, cleared the way for further progress.

Peter discussed this with Gerry Collins on 11 March. It is common ground that we need before long to bring matters to a resolution, and that we should aim to do this before the next Intergovernmental Conference, which it is now envisaged will take place on 9 April. It was also accepted that we should seek to avoid a situation in which your Government was invited to agree to a text which the Northern Ireland parties would subsequently be free to amend or reject. In the light of this discussion and recent contacts with all concerned Peter has now prepared a text for a statement which represents his own best judgement of what would be a basis for talks that safeguards the genuine concerns of the potential participants including, of course, your own Government. Nearly all of the substance and much of the language of this document will already be familiar to you; it draws directly from the extremely helpful draft which your Government put forward on 6 February; elements owe their provenance to Mr Molyneux and Dr Paisley and to Mr Hume and his colleagues. It aims to provide a basis on which all the parties can move forward into the three strands of substantive talks.

My colleagues and I have given this matter our most careful consideration. We conclude that we have reached the point where we should either proceed to formal talks, or acknowledge that it is, at present, impossible to do so. I very much hope that you will share our view that the document adequately accommodates the essential principles of all concerned. I believe that it provides a good basis from which

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talks comprising all three elements identified in the paper can be successfully launched. These could provide the framework for the development of new and imaginative thinking such as you referred to in your speech on 9 March. They offer the means by which all might agree to a strengthening of the democratic procedures that all see as desirable. That is why I am writing personally to commend to you and to your colleagues the document which Peter has prepared and to seek your continued support.

The document will be sent to the four party leaders on Thursday, 14 March so that it reaches them simultaneously. I should be most grateful if you would preserve the confidentiality of this communication at least until that has happened. Peter will explain that while the text may not be regarded as ideal by any participant we do not intend to amend it or to have further negotiations on it. I hope that they will also feel able to give their endorsement to the approach Peter outlines. We shall make it known that this has been handed over but that it is not our intention to publish the document at this stage; and we will suggest that all concerned continue to respect its confidentiality while they consider it. Of course, should the press begin to publish selected or distorted passages then, in order to preserve the integrity of the process, it might be necessary for us to publish the text in full ourselves. If Peter is not able to make the statement because one of the potential participants is not satisfied that it represents an acceptable basis for formal talks we will in any event release the text as a record of the conclusions which we as a Government have drawn from the exchanges of the past fourteen months.

In order to maintain the momentum with the Northern Ireland parties in the light of the Parliamentary timetable, they will be asked to give their reactions by 26 March. Peter is sending a separate note to Gerry Collins in the United States with a copy of the text and suggesting a further informal meeting as soon as he returns. If, as I hope, there

is no objection, it would then be possible for Peter to make this statement in the House of Commons on 27 March. He could discuss with Gerry Collins whether, as partners in this enterprise, you would wish to be associated with this announcement and, if so, how that might be achieved.

Yours sincerely,

John

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

PROPOSED STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

1. Mr Speaker, I am pleased to be able to inform the House that, following extensive discussions with the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland - the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party - and with the Irish Government, a basis for formal political talks now exists. I frankly acknowledge to the House that this would not have been possible without the goodwill and determination of the Northern Ireland parties and the helpful and constructive approach taken by the Irish Government. The stated positions of all these parties are well known. Her Majesty's Government reaffirms its position that Northern Ireland's present status as a part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people.

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2. The endeavour on which we have all agreed to embark is an ambitious one. We are setting out to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands. While a successful outcome cannot be guaranteed in advance, I am confident that all the potential participants are committed to a forward-looking and constructive approach. For their part, the two signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement - the British and Irish Governments - have made clear that they would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based agreement or structure if such an arrangement can be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all of the parties concerned.

3. To allow an opportunity for such a wider political dialogue the two Governments have agreed not to hold a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference between two pre-specified dates. All of the parties concerned will make use of this interval for intensive discussions to seek the new and more broadly based agreement which I have just described.

4. As the Conference will not be meeting between the specified dates, the Secretariat at Maryfield will accordingly not be required for that period to discharge its normal role of servicing Conference meetings provided for in Article 3 of the Agreement.

5. It is accepted that discussions must focus on three main relationships: those within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; among the people of the island of Ireland; and between the two Governments. It is common ground between all the parties that hope of achieving a new and more broadly based agreement rests on finding a way to give adequate expression to the totality of the relationships I have mentioned.

6. Talks will accordingly take place in three strands corresponding respectively to the three relationships. Some arrangement will be needed for liaison between the different strands of these complex discussions. All the Northern Ireland parties will participate actively and directly in the North/South discussions. The Unionist parties have made clear that they wish their participation in those talks to be formally associated with my presence and that they will regard themselves as members of the United Kingdom team.

7. It is accepted by all those involved that, so as to make full use of the interval between meetings of the Conference to achieve an overall agreement satisfactory to all, it will be necessary to have launched all three sets of discussions within weeks of each other.

8. A first step towards getting related discussions under way in all three strands will be the opening, as soon as possible, of substantive talks between the parties in Northern Ireland under my chairmanship. These will commence with a round of bilateral meetings before moving on, as soon as possible, into plenary sessions. It has been agreed by all the participants that before long, when, after consultation, I judge that an appropriate point has been reached, I will propose formally that the other two strands should be launched. My judgement as to timing will be governed by the fact that all involved have agreed that the three sets of discussions will be under way within weeks of each other.

9. The internal talks, like the talks in the other strands, will follow a demanding and intensive schedule. In order to ensure a full airing of the issues, it will be open to each of the parties to raise any aspect of these relationships including constitutional issues, or any other matter which it considers relevant. All concerned have assured me that they

will participate in good faith and will make every effort to achieve progress.

10. It is accepted by all the parties that nothing will be finally agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole and that confidentiality will be maintained thereunto. However, in the final analysis the outcome will need to be acceptable to the people.

**MESSAGE FROM THE RT. HON. PETER BROOKE, MP, SECRETARY OF
STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND TO MR GERARD COLLINS, TD, MINISTER
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS: 13 MARCH 1991**

Dear Gerry,

I was very glad that we were able to meet on Monday.

We were, I think, both agreed that we need to achieve some clear resolution of our efforts to establish substantive political talks by the time we next meet in the Intergovernmental Conference on 9 April, at the latest. You also made clear your wish to avoid a situation in which your Government was invited to agree to a text which the Northern Ireland parties would subsequently be free to amend or reject, to taste.

At our meeting we touched on some issues which remained of concern, despite the very helpful paper you tabled on 6 February which, as I said, created a good deal of additional room for manoeuvre.

After reflecting on our discussion, I duly consulted my Cabinet colleagues most closely concerned. The outcome was the decision that we should table a text in a final attempt to secure agreement from all those who would participate in substantive talks if they were held. The Prime Minister decided that he should himself write to the Taoiseach to seek his continued support.

I was anxious to ensure that you received a copy of that letter when it is delivered to the Taoiseach. It is for this reason that I am sending this message, with its enclosures. My intention is to give the text to the Northern Ireland party leaders tomorrow (14 March). I will explain that this is what I am doing when I answer Parliamentary Questions in the afternoon.

As you will see, in order to maintain the momentum with them in the light of the Parliamentary timetable, the Northern Ireland parties will be asked to give their reactions by 26 March. If they and you have no objection to this basis for moving forward into talks then I would hope

to make the statement in the House of Commons on 27 March, effectively the last Parliamentary opportunity before the IGC on 9 April.

The point of decision however has been set for a time after your return to Ireland. I should of course be delighted to meet you at that time for an informal discussion of all this. In the meantime my officials stand ready to meet yours, as you } suggested, if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Brooke