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Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

23 February, 1996

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

Dear *John*

I found our conversation this morning very positive and helpful.

This letter is intended to identify the key points we will be discussing on Sunday.

I welcome very much our joint determination to have a specific date for all party negotiations to which we will hold. We believe this is key to our endeavours to renew the ceasefire.

We have always been clear between us that an immediate transition, without further preconditions, from any elective process to all party negotiations, on a three stranded basis, was an essential requirement if nationalists were to have any incentive to consider such a process. It is understood, of course, that in the case of Sinn Féin, the restoration of the IRA ceasefire would have to precede entry to the negotiations.

On the election issue, as I said to you, we believe nationalists have made substantial movement in accepting the principle of an elective process. We believe, therefore, that the issues of the form of the process and not having a body as such should be settled as closely as possible to the nationalists' position on these matters.

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They remain deeply opposed, as you will be aware, to any form of elective process other than a Northern Ireland-wide list approach, and also to any role or function being attributed to an elected body. The sole purpose of any elective process should be the selection of negotiating teams. The inclusion of the loyalist parties must, I believe, also be satisfactorily accommodated in any such process.

As regards your proposed "building blocks" paper, I believe it is essential that the draft should be in the hands of our negotiating teams for definitive discussion as soon as possible.

Reflecting on statements in our Parliaments, our officials' discussions with Sinn Féin suggest that a formal statement from you in the House of Commons would carry particular weight in underlining our joint decision to have all party negotiations on a specific date. An affirmative resolution, approving our agreement, in both Parliaments would be crucial in removing any uncertainty about such a date.

For completeness, may I say Paddy Teahon has informed me that our officials have received a draft Communiqué which in our view requires a number of amendments to be acceptable, especially in relation to having a specific date for negotiations to which we hold. We cannot accept a date for negotiations that is dependant on agreement on the form of an elective process. That would undermine belief in the definitive nature of a specific date.

I look forward to our conversation on Sunday and to an early Summit.

With very wishes
Yours sincerely,



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PERSONAL - IN CONFIDENCE

THE PRIME MINISTER

15 February 1996

Thank you for your helpful letter of 11 February. I am sorry that I was unable to speak to you on the phone last night but you will know that we are currently in the middle of what one of my distinguished predecessors once called a little local difficulty.

Following my statement on Monday, further contacts with both Unionist parties, and what I have heard of today's good Liaison Group meeting, I am more confident than ever that a package of elections leading directly and immediately to all-party negotiations is achievable. I am also confident that we can work together successfully on this package and make very rapid progress, and that the concerns you express in your letter can be met:

- the only process we have in mind is one that leads through elections directly and speedily to all-party negotiations. Once we launch the process, the start of negotiations will follow within a set and public timetable;
- we are aiming for a process which Sinn Fein can join once the renewed IRA violence is ended;
- the consent principle is vital and will need to be addressed in the negotiations, but I do not intend to make any kind of precondition out of it;

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All this is preparatory to our own planned meeting, which I see as both crucial in itself and the culmination of all our joint efforts. It seems to me that 21 February is going to be too soon for all to be ready. I wonder therefore if we might look at Friday 23 February on a contingency basis? No doubt our offices can be in touch about this.

I will want to talk to you in some detail about how we can use the Summit to best effect. It is essential that when we meet we demonstrate clearly and publicly how we propose together to carry matters forward. I will not anticipate this but look forward to our conversation. The exact timing can be arranged between John Holmes and Paddy Teahon as usual, but from my point of view the earlier in the weekend we can do it, the better.

Yours Ever,
John

Mr. John Bruton, T.D.