

75/8.

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Chesterton - B

cc PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B  
Mr Miles - B  
Mr J McConnell - B

IF THE SDLP/SINN FEIN TALKS END

On reflection, and as indicated in my paper of yesterday, I think it might be helpful to put a short piece of advice to the Secretary of State before his departure (and I gather we should just catch him today). A draft is attached. I have discussed the suggestion it contains in broad terms with Sir Kenneth, who was generally content.

(Signed)

D C KIRK

Constitutional & Political Division

3 August 1988

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SERVICE

PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B

cc PS/Mr Stewart(L&B)-B  
PS/Dr Mawhinney(L&B)-B  
PS/PUS (L&B) - B  
1. PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B  
Mr Burns o/r - B  
Mr Miles - B  
Mr Kirk - B  
Mr J McConnell - B

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#### DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SDLP/SINN FEIN TALKS IN AUGUST

It is possible - but perhaps not probable - that the SDLP/Sinn Fein talks will be seen to have come to an end during the course of this month, at a time when the Secretary of State will be absent from the office. It seems quite likely that the ending of the talks would not be clear-cut, but it may be that the major obstacle which the Unionists earlier identified to talks with the SDLP will appear to have been removed. In these circumstances, it would be desirable for the NIO to be ready with a line to take both with Unionists and the media.

2. I suggest that, if it is made known that the SDLP/Sinn Fein talks have ended and this seems likely to lead to speculation about talks between Unionists and the SDLP, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield should seek to have a discreet word with the Unionist leaders. He would remind them of what the Secretary of State said in the Interim Period extension debate about inter-party dialogue being the next step, and the desirability of removing obstacles to such talks; and, on behalf of the Secretary of State, he could extend an invitation to the Unionist leaders to a further bilateral meeting to discuss the new situation, as soon as the Secretary of State returns. (Mr King has already indicated that he would like such a meeting). If this led to the pencilling in of a date for a meeting, so much the better. Sir Kenneth might thus be able to encourage the Unionist leaders not to close any doors in any public statements they might make.

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3. In response to any media enquiries or speculation, we would similarly refer to the terms of statements made by the Secretary of State about the desirability of inter-party talks and the removal of obstacles to such a dialogue. It would now, we could say, be for the constitutional political parties to reflect further on the new developments. Depending on the views expressed to Sir Kenneth by the Unionist leaders, we might also be able to indicate that a further meeting with the Unionist leaders was planned.

4. This situation may well not arise this month, but I should be grateful to know that the Secretary of State would be content with our proposed approach, on a contingency basis. The details would, of course, be subject to further Ministerial clearance at the time.

(Signed)

D CHESTERTON

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