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General.

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FROM: J JOHNSTON
CENTRAL SECRETARIAT
30 JULY 1997

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/Mr Murphy (DFP, B&L)
PS/Mr Ingram (DED, B&L)
PS/Mr Worthington (DENI, DHSS&L)
PS/Lord Dubs (DANI, DOE & L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Thomas
Mr Steele
Mr Leach
Mr Bell
Mr Watkins
Mr Stephens
Mr Wood (B&L)
Mr Carson
Mr Hill
Mr Lavery
Mr Perry
Mr Maccabe
Mr Whysall
Ms Kirk
Mr Warner

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

MEETING WITH FORUM CHAIRMAN: MONDAY 28 JULY 1997

The Secretary of State, Sir David Fell, Mr Whysall and myself met Mr John Gorman, Chairman of the Forum, accompanied by Mr Carson. It was the Secretary of State's first meeting with Mr Gorman since the General Election and was arranged at his request to discuss the performance of the Forum.

SofS request!

[Signature]

Summary

A friendly and relaxed meeting with Mr Gorman expressing the view that the Forum was performing well with the exception of Standing Committee A (Public Order) which had mishandled the parades issue. A wide ranging discussion covering the role of the Chairman and his application of Forum Rule 13(1), ministerial contacts with the Forum, the Parades Committee Report, development of the Forum and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.

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Mr Gorman as Chairman

The **Secretary of State** congratulated Mr Gorman on the confirmation of his appointment as Chairman by the Forum when it resumed business in June. She said that it wasn't an easy job and he had done well. **Mr Gorman** replied that he had no one to ask for advice on how to carry out the job as the speakers from the previous Northern Ireland Assemblies were dead. He had thought of contacting Betty Boothroyd to seek advice although he appreciated that this might lead to speculation that some form of NI devolved assembly was about to be set up. The **Secretary of State** acknowledged the presentational difficulties of such a meeting and suggested an informal chat over tea with the Speaker which she would be happy to arrange when Mr Gorman is next in London.

Ministerial Contacts with the Forum

The **Secretary of State** apologised for her non-appearance at the Forum explaining that Fridays, when the Forum meets, was particularly busy for her but she hoped to visit some time in the future. She added that she did meet Forum members at Westminster and at the Talks and therefore they shouldn't feel deprived at not seeing her in the Forum. **Mr Gorman** accepted this and said that meetings involving Forum Committees and her ministerial colleagues are appreciated by Members. He suggested that a visit from the Secretary of State when the Talks resume may be useful for Mr Trimble as he was having a rotten time with poor discipline among his Party in the Forum.

Forum Parades Committee Report

Mr Gorman expressed unhappiness with Cedric Wilson's (UKUP) general attitude towards the Secretary of State and in particular Wilson's mishandling of the Forum Parades Report. The **Secretary of State** replied that she would read the Report and respond in full as soon

as the Parades legislation is settled. This led into a discussion about Mr Gorman's affirmation of the Report under Forum Rule 13(1). **Sir David Fell** commented that there was a view that the Report represented only the unionist viewpoint of Parades and surprise when Mr Gorman affirmed it. **Mr Gorman** replied that Wilson had run the Committee very badly but that the non-unionist parties should have remained in the Committee to argue a more balanced case. In the absence of the SDLP he had to make his own judgement and had drawn up two contrasting judgements but opted for a positive decision on the Report, without horse trading, in order to influence Forum Members like Jeffrey Donaldson towards a more equitable unionist attitude on Parades.

Chairman's Application of Forum Rule 13(1)

Sir David Fell asked about guidelines which Mr Gorman has drawn up to help him in applying Rule 13(1). **Mr Gorman** replied that these had recently been approved by the Business Committee and were sent to Forum Members last week. The SDLP had been very keen on implementing Rule 13(1) when they were in the Business Committee and their absence from the Committee was noticeable as they had made an enormous contribution to it. **Mr Whysall** commented that it was the Secretary of State who had moved the amendment to the Forum legislation which provided for Rule 13(1). The **Secretary of State** commented that several of her colleagues in speeches had said that the SDLP should return to the Forum although she appreciated that it would be tiring for the key players in the Party to be involved in the Forum, the Talks and at Westminster.

Future Development of the Forum

Mr Gorman said that it would be tempting to reduce the Forum Plenary from a weekly to a monthly meeting although that would adversely impact on the weekly Business Committee meeting which provided a

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useful interface for the parties. However, it would be wonderful if the SDLP and Sinn Fein were to become involved. He referred to a recent Church of Ireland Bishops' dinner at which he met Judge McGuinness and compared the Dublin Forum for Peace and Reconciliation with the Northern Ireland Forum. According to the Judge the involvement of Sinn Fein had beneficially exposed them to the views of ordinary people up to the point when the principle of consent was introduced. The **Secretary of State** referred to press speculation about the possible reactivation of the Dublin Forum and suggested that if this occurs it might be worthwhile arranging some form of interface between the two Forums. **Mr Gorman** responded positively commenting that there was a difference between the two bodies in that the Northern Ireland Forum was elected.

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

The **Secretary of State** asked how the women were doing in the Forum as she understood they were called terrible things by some of the other Members. **Mr Gorman** replied that the NIWC were very brave with Ms Sager capable of making her point without being combative whereas Ms McWilliams is a firebrand.

[Signed: JJ]

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