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FROM: D J R HILL
Constitutional & Political Division
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cc: see attached list

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B)

PROMOTING SUPPORT FOR AN AGREEMENT/THE REFERENDUM

To supplement Mr Woods' tentative handling plan I attach an outline of the general "message" which Ministers might aim to convey in the period between now and the launch of any formal referendum campaign. Obviously it could be shortened or expanded to fit the precise requirement, but I have tried to cover all the key elements of what I think the current message should be, and underlined the key points.

2. The message is designed to build support for the talks process by setting out the key rationale for it, the benefits likely to flow from it and the safeguards which exist for both sides of the community; to build up expectations and to stimulate interest in the key issues under consideration; and altogether to prepare the ground on both sides of the community for the terms of an honourable compromise. In drawing it up I have taken account of Mr Maccabe's account of the current state of public opinion in Northern Ireland.

3. As the shape of any agreement begins to firm up the terms of any Government message may of course need to change, but that is difficult to formulate at this stage.

4. If the Secretary of State and Mr Murphy are content we will draw on these themes in preparing articles, speeches, lines to take etc in the weeks ahead as the proposed "campaign" gets under way.

Signed: David Hill

D J R HILL
Constitutional & Political Division
11 Millbank ☎ 6591
Castle Buildings ☎ 22298

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BUILDING SUPPORT FOR THE REFERENDUM

Key points to make in the period before an agreement is reached

1. The violence of the past is only a symptom of the deep political divisions within Northern Ireland society.
2. What we have seen over the past few years reflects a growing understanding that the way forward for Northern Ireland is to produce a political settlement to which both sides of the community can give their allegiance, and which would - over time - heal those divisions.
3. Such a settlement would bring political stability and underpin lasting peace. [We are working for a society in which political disagreements can be resolved through political dialogue; in which people can go about their daily lives free from the threat of random terrorism; in which businessmen and their employees can seek the benefits of commercial success without one hand tied behind their back; in which parents need worry less about what their children have been involved in, or if they are late home.]
4. It has long been accepted that any settlement must address all the fundamental concerns of both sides of the community, or it will not work. Those concerns extend beyond the boundaries of Northern Ireland: Unionists want to secure changes to the Irish Constitution and a replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement; nationalists want some practical recognition of their Irish nationalist identity. These issues can only be addressed in negotiations involving the British and Irish Governments, as well as the Northern Ireland parties.
5. Those negotiations are operating under rules of procedure which safeguard everyone's essential interests. Agreement will require the support of parties which between them represent a majority of Unionists and a majority of nationalists, and nothing will be implemented unless that agreement is endorsed by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland voting in a referendum.
6. The negotiations have also been established on a basis which is consistent with certain fundamental principles. All participants have expressed their total and absolute commitment to the "Mitchell" principles of democracy and non violence, and the two Governments have shown their readiness to take firm action where that commitment is demonstrably dishonoured.
7. Additionally the parties have expressed their support for the two Governments' commitment to the principle of consent as a guiding principle in the talks. There can be no question of Northern Ireland ceasing to be a part of the United Kingdom without the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. Equally, we want the new

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political arrangements to be ones which can be supported by all sections of society in Northern Ireland.

8. It would be wrong to pre-empt the outcome of the negotiations, which are continuing with even greater intensity as the May deadline approaches, but it is already clear that any settlement will incorporate

- an agreed approach to constitutional issues, based on the principle of consent.
- new democratically-elected political institutions in Northern Ireland, including an Assembly. These institutions should improve the quality of local decision taking and give local politicians the chance to work together and give their communities a lead in the process of reconciliation
- new East/West arrangements, including an intergovernmental council, to facilitate co-operation between the two sovereign Governments and the various devolved institutions in Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff
- new North/South arrangements, including a North/South Ministerial Council and associated implementation bodies. These will maximise the scope for those with executive responsibilities, North and South, to work together in their mutual interest and will help give expression to the Irish nationalist identity of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland
- a range of developments designed to provide for equality of opportunity and full equity of treatment for all the people of Northern Ireland in every field of life, and to lay the foundation for significant changes to policing and justice issues as the terrorist threat diminishes.

9. There is much detail yet to be negotiated but it is already clear that a settlement embracing these elements would not represent a victory for either side, but a victory for common sense - a victory for all the people of Northern Ireland.

10. The politicians involved in the negotiations need your support as they grapple with these important issues and edge towards agreement. Now is the time for everyone of influence in the community and ordinary people through whatever groups they may belong to, or by whatever means they can, to express their support for the process of political negotiation and encourage their political representatives as they enter the final straight.

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