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BRITISH EMBASSY,  
DUBLIN.

SECRET BY FIN...

21 March 1980

cc Private Secretary to the Taoiseach (✓)  
PSS (✓)  
Mr Neligan (✓)

Mr Peter Smith  
Private Secretary to  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
St Stephen's Green  
Dublin 2

*Dear Peter,*

As you know, Mr Lenihan and Mr Atkins spoke on the telephone this afternoon.

I now enclose a copy of the text of a message from Mr Atkins to your Minister about the proposed meeting in Dublin.

It was dictated over the telephone to us and I hope it is accurate!

*Yours sincerely,*

*WRH*

W R Haydon

TEXT OF MESSAGE FROM THE RT HON HUMPHREY ATKINS MP, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, TO MR BRIAN LENIHAN TD, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

I am writing to you about the talks we have arranged to have in Dublin next week; but I hope that before you read this letter I shall have had an opportunity to tell you personally what I have in mind.

You will know from Sir Robin Haydon that I look forward to meeting you and that I hope we can maintain regular contacts in person. I am sure you will understand too, that I have to approach these meetings with great sensitivity at any time and especially now when the UK Government is actively seeking to restore devolved government to Northern Ireland in a way which will be acceptable to all sections of the community there. When the arrangements for our meeting were made, I had this aspect very much in mind. My expectation was that the conference on the government of Northern Ireland which has, as you know, been meeting at intervals at Stormont over recent weeks, would continue up to, or even beyond, Easter; and although a visit by me to Dublin at such a time would have called for delicate handling as far as some members of the conference were concerned, I judged that this would be manageable.

However, as you may have seen from the press, the conference is likely to adjourn on Monday, 24 March, so that I can report to the Cabinet and prepare proposals for further discussion. At such a moment, so soon after the adjournment of the conference, there would be a risk that the purpose of such a meeting would be misinterpreted and create in some quarters suspicions that could threaten the process of political development on which we have embarked. Such suspicions would be groundless: but I am sure neither of us would want to create any avoidable obstacle to progress.

I hope you will understand if I ask that my visit be postponed - not for very long, but sufficiently to remove the risk of an apparent connection with the adjournment of the conference. I should therefore like to suggest that, if it were convenient to you, we might perhaps meet after Easter, perhaps on 17/18 April (which is the earliest I could manage after Easter). I would certainly hope we could avoid a longer postponement than this.

I trust this will not create any inconvenience for you or Gerry Collins, whom I had also hoped to meet again; and I am sorry to have to change our arrangement at such short notice.