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From: Tony Beeton
XDS
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CIVIL SERVICE

cc: PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Feil - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Brooke - B
Mr Daniell - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Shannon - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Williams - B
Mr Brooker
Mrs Brown - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Marsh - B
Mr Stephens
Mr R Lyne, No 10
Mr P Lever, Cabinet Office
HMA, Dublin - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B

cc Mr Maxwell

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

Ref: XD/R4

EXPLORATORY DIALOGUE: RECORD OF THE FOURTH MEETING WITH SINN FEIN,
1 FEBRUARY 1995

The fourth meeting of exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein was held on Wednesday 1 February 1995 in Parliament Buildings, Belfast. The Government team, headed by Quentin Thomas, was Stephen Leach, David Watkins, Chris Maccabe, Jonathan Stephens and Tony Beeton. The Sinn Fein delegation headed by Martin McGuinness had one change from the previous meeting. The newcomer was Caoimhghin O'Caolain who joined Gerry Kelly, Bairbre De Brun and Siobhan O'Hanlon. The meeting began at 11.40 am.

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2. Quentin Thomas opened the meeting by referring to reports in that morning's Irish Times that Sinn Fein had placed a limit of a further two meetings on this exploratory dialogue. He emphasised that no such limit had been agreed by the Government and that it would be unhelpful to do so. There should be no misunderstanding - the Government would not put any artificial limits to this process. Martin McGuinness replied that Sinn Fein had not issued any statement to that effect. A press officer had received a call and was asked to confirm that a further five meetings of exploratory dialogue were intended. This, in Mr McGuinness's view, suggested that someone had been briefing on the content of the workplan which the Government had given to Sinn Fein previously. "It must have been you," he said. Mr Thomas said that it was possible that journalists could put together statements made after the previous meeting with the workplan for the dialogue with the loyalists which had been made public and reach their own conclusions. Mr McGuinness's sceptical silence was audible.

3. Sinn Fein wanted to move speedily on he said. They wished to accomplish a successful outcome to the workplan but it was, he observed, a disaster that the people who sent the British delegation to this dialogue did not come themselves. Mr Thomas accepted that Sinn Fein had made it clear that they believed that it was right to move as soon as possible to inclusive talks, and to involve Ministers in exploratory dialogue. But he added that the British delegation were present, as we had set out in our paper, speaking with political authority. He himself had spoken on the subject of the possible future involvement of Ministers at the previous meeting. He reminded the Sinn Fein team that it was an important part of our position that nothing should be excluded from the process to which either side attached importance. Mr McGuinness half signalled assent to that proposition.

Responses

4. Mr Thomas said that we had sent Sinn Fein a response to their previous paper 'Towards a Negotiated Settlement 3' which set out

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answers to the questions they had raised, and included some questions for Sinn Fein. It also recorded the significant observation Sinn Fein had made on the IRA's weapons and its own influence. Mr McGuinness said that although the paper had been received in advance he himself had only had it a short time. The Sinn Fein side would consider it in detail, as would their Ard Comhairle, and would formulate a response. Mr Thomas confirmed that the Government side intended to publish the document after the meeting unless Sinn Fein had any objection to that. Mr McGuinness recalled Sinn Fein's commitment to transparency and said there would be no problem with that.

5. Turning to matters touched on in the response, Mr McGuinness said that the Government recognised Sinn Fein was at this dialogue on the basis of its mandate. It was essential that people must have parity of treatment and this hadn't been the case so far. He repeated Sinn Fein's view that we must move more speedily and that one purpose they had for the meeting was to establish today, or before the next meeting if that wasn't possible, when Ministers would join the process. He added that Sinn Fein would deal with this issue in private for the present although there was growing unease that the Government would not engage politically with Sinn Fein. He contrasted this with Peter Brooke's comments on the previous evening's Panorama film about Gerry Adams in which Mr Brooke had praised Mr Adams' courage in relation to the peace process. There was a wide expectation of speedy movement now and none of us in this room, he said, would want to be part of a charade. We must be conscious of that and the need not to bring the process into disrepute. Mr McGuinness apologised for putting his point to the Government team forcibly. 'This is not aimed at you personally,' he said, but to those who send you. Frankly it was quite ludicrous that after each of the meetings he himself went out and talked to the press outside Parliament Buildings and was followed some time later by Michael Ancram commenting on a meeting he had not been at.

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6. Mr Thomas said that there was no doubting Sinn Fein's position on this matter. He agreed wholeheartedly that we had no desire to be involved in a charade. There were real substantive issues across the range of the Government's responsibilities in Northern Ireland and some specifics, for example, the practical consequences for the ending of violence and the ground rules for talks which should be discussed further, but the Government did not envisage a never-ending process. We had some differences of approach and to different subjects. Sinn Fein had said that some were for the inclusive talks rather than of any concern in this dialogue. Mr McGuinness interrupted to say they were not of no concern to Sinn Fein. Mr Thomas picked up the point and referring to arms said the Government would like to talk to Sinn Fein about this and possibly give them a paper. Such evidence of a real engagement would take us to the heart of the issue. Mr McGuinness said there were difficulties and problems with that and it got us to the point of a precondition. Mr Thomas observed that it was easy to make preconditions if you wanted to but this wasn't one. Why then was it so important asked Mr McGuinness. Precisely because Sinn Fein hadn't taken the paper, explained Mr Thomas. If we talked about it - securing substantial progress on that issue with Sinn Fein (and the loyalists) - that would help a great deal.

7. From what had seemed a fairly thoughtful exchange Mr McGuinness rapidly moved towards a more familiar script. Would the Government give a paper to others, for example, the UUP and the DUP? Did the Government accept the role of the DUP in establishing Ulster Resistance? We knew as well as anyone else about red berets on hillsides and Mr Paisley and his firearm certificates so why treat Sinn Fein so differently from other parties? Mr Leach attempted a gentle explanation. The Government side was seeking to discuss the issue with parties who had influence in the right quarters. The CLMC statement had referred to the role of the UDP and PUP in securing their ceasefire therefore they were clearly a channel of communication and a conduit of influence.

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8. Mr McGuinness would not be diverted from his theme. Everybody knew the UUP had played a major role in securing the CLMC ceasefire. Elected members of the DUP frequently made incendiary remarks and that was true especially in Belfast where they were cheerleaders for loyalist death squads. No Sinn Fein councillor went that far. Mr Leach said that the Government was not trying to make a political point but to exercise a judgement that in the case of the loyalists the UDP and PUP were a reliable channel. Again Mr McGuinness pressed his theme. Were the DUP instrumental in Ulster Resistance and in securing arms that went on to the UDA. Changing tack he switched to quoting Sir Hugh Annesley who, he asserted, in recent comments had said that the IRA's ability to produce home-made weapons was undiminished and therefore that the issue of decommissioning arms was a distraction. It was incumbent on the Government to move on from an issue over which Sinn Fein had no control.

9. Mr Thomas patiently observed that the Government wanted to engage with Sinn Fein on the basis of its influence and again he mentioned the possibility of handing a paper to Sinn Fein. "Would you accept a paper?" he asked Mr McGuinness. Mr McGuinness paused suspiciously. He would be reluctant to accept a paper. Sensing his hesitation, Mr Thomas said that the Government side was not trying to set Sinn Fein up. It would be helpful to have a discussion with or without a paper. He then turned to the question of the involvement of Ministers in the dialogue and attempted a few sentences to the accompaniment first of a JCB working underneath the window and then to a counterpoint from a drill somewhere in the corridors adjacent to the conference room. The Government team proposed a brief adjournment which Mr McGuinness accepted quipping as the drill started again with renewed vigour that he had assumed the Government team had already got the microphones in.

10. After the adjournment discussion on the question of Ministers joining the dialogue continued. Mr Thomas referred to the speaking note he had delivered at the previous meeting. He then asked Mr McGuinness a direct question, "You appear to be offering a

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private ultimatum that unless Ministers appear at the next meeting you might not continue?". Mr McGuinness denied that it was an ultimatum, but it was a matter of great concern to Sinn Fein and if Ministers did not attend they would have to look at how they presented the issue publicly. Mr Thomas agreed that it was an important matter and referred again to the paper given previously to Sinn Fein which had set out the criteria Ministers were likely to adopt in judging their own involvement: both sides should agree that no issue should be excluded from the dialogue and there should be serious and substantive exploration of all issues. Ministers want to be involved, he added, and he undertook to report again to Ministers that Sinn Fein attached great importance to their appearing in the dialogue. Mr McGuinness returned to the charge. We had now had five months of peace, he said, and there was very high public expectation that Ministers would join in. Prolonging this part of the process would bring it into public disrepute. 'Why?', asked Mr Thomas and repeated that officials were present under political authority... Mr McGuinness interrupted to say that this was of crucial importance, and it was a matter of parity of esteem for Sinn Fein.

Policing and Criminal Justice

11. On that note at 12.40 pm it was agreed to move on to the next item on the agenda. Mr Leach set the scene. Our overall policy in this area had been set out in our opening statement, he said. The Government was committed to the vigorous and impartial treatment of crime by the police but it would also respond imaginatively to the ending of violence. There was a wide current public debate on policing matters with the Police Authority Consultation and the Government's own criminal justice initiative. The need for emergency legislation was kept under continuous review. The Government would appreciate Sinn Fein's views on these matters and would respond to them.

12. Mr McGuinness began with the police. The RUC, he said, were regarded by Sinn Fein as the military wing of unionism. They were

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unacceptable to nationalists and it was clear that we needed to move to inclusive peace negotiations to resolve these issues. The experience of nationalist people since partition at the hands of the RUC confirmed that it was a coercive, repressive and oppressive machine. He went on to recall torture in interrogation centres and young people shot and killed in the streets. Very few members of the police had ever been charged he said. He himself recalled standing in the Bogside in 1969 watching the RUC storming the area alongside the loyalists. For all these reasons the RUC could not be the force to resolve the question of who polices society. Certainly Sinn Fein recognised that policing was essential, but the RUC must be disbanded and a new policing service established. He then cited recent interviews with the Chief Constable to indicate what he described as the lack of perception of the problem at the head of the force.

13. Mr Leach said that naturally the Government would not accept that analysis. His own belief was that since the ceasefires some of the pressures had been lifted and there was an increased usage of police services from all sections of the community, and that the RUC had also experienced an increase in applications to join from Catholics. In recent attitude surveys 69% of Catholics said that the police were doing a good job. It was, of course, essential for them to be impartial, effective and fair. Clearly there was more to be done and he acknowledged that it would be an issue for the wider process since other parties had views too. But could he ask Sinn Fein what they believed would be the characteristics of the kind of new force they proposed.

14. Mr McGuinness said that there were certain recognised international standards of policing. He repeated that at this stage of the process the RUC was unacceptable. What was necessary was a police service which reflected the community. Without such a service we would have anarchy. But the truth was the RUC had too much baggage of history. He recognised that this was not a comfortable discussion for the Government team, but Mr Thomas interrupted to say that we were glad to have it. It was inevitable that views of the RUC would differ. However he noted that there was

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considerable common ground between us - the Government and Sinn Fein both wanted effective, fair and acceptable policing. Sinn Fein (and he agreed with Mr McGuinness's comment that it wasn't only Sinn Fein) were entitled to say that the RUC did not fulfill those criteria. But, that led to an important question as to how far, in Sinn Fein's view, was the RUC irredeemable. Was the problem its Unionist roots, or that it was a Northern Ireland-wide force. Would the RUC operating within an agreed political framework make a difference? Mr McGuinness said that this was really territory for all party talks. He would say that the Police Service must be answerable and accountable to the people but it was proper for others to express their views on this. He knew the SDLP had ideas of their own and noted that others would have too.

15. Mr Thomas then suggested that the discussion move to focus on criminal justice issues. Mr McGuinness said that again this was really an issue for the full Talks. However, as a contribution to a preliminary discussion he delivered an indictment of British justice in Ireland. Since 1800, he said there had been more than 100 Acts of Coercion in Ireland. In Northern Ireland today the right to silence had been removed, there was a presumption of guilt, there had been removal of right to jury trial, and various international bodies from the European Court of Human Rights, and Amnesty International to Helsinki Watch had all criticised the operation of criminal justice in Northern Ireland. These problems were set in the context of a high degree of militarisation of society. People were stopped and searched on the street, detained for long periods, and everybody knew about the frequent miscarriages of justice. Moreover there was a conspiracy of silence within the security forces. He cited the Stalker report and what he described as the hypocrisy of the British establishment over the Pte Lee Clegg case. Mr McGuinness noted in passing that it would be important to release all the prisoners on all sides although he noted that Clegg was in fact an exception rather than the rule. The paratroopers responsible for the killings on Bloody Sunday did not face Diplock Courts he said. The EPA must be repealed, searches must be stopped, interrogation centres should be closed, the Diplock Courts

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abandoned, internment powers scrapped, all roads reopened, spy posts dismantled.... he drew breath. Clearly we could not sort all this out at these meetings.

16. Mr Thomas observed that the structure and powers which Mr McGuinness had described related to an emergency. They had not grown out of thin air. It was a common wish that they should be dismantled. The Government had said in its opening statement that we wish to return to civilian policing and would certainly want to remove emergency measures which were no longer necessary. Mr Leach also reminded Mr McGuinness that the European Court of Human Rights had found in general that the measures being taken by the Government were proportionate to the threat. In the past 25 years there had been many dreadful IRA atrocities and it was necessary to get the balance right. Mr McGuinness returned his point about the difference in application of the powers. He mentioned Bloody Sunday again and other killings by soldiers, and, of course, the Gibraltar shootings he added. There had also been delays on inquests in such cases - for as much as 12 years. Mr Leach pointed out that all deaths caused by the action of the Security Forces were thoroughly investigated. Clegg, he reminded Mr McGuinness, had been convicted on the evidence of an RUC Officer after an attempted cover up. Mr McGuinness was not going to be convinced. Corporal Thain, he said had been released after 26 months.

17. Mr Thomas broke into the discussion to emphasise that he might agree that the principle of law was fair but sometimes its application would vary. We wanted anyway to put all this behind us. Mr McGuinness had correctly noted that much of this would for the multi-party Talks, but he thought probably there wouldn't be all that much left for them since almost by definition many of the special powers would not be operating by then.

Ground Rules for Talks

18. Mr Stephens introduced the discussion. The Government had set out its fundamental principles in the Joint Declaration and its role

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to encourage, facilitate and enable agreement. The talks were an important means to achieving that. It was our belief that talks should be as inclusive as possible - that is open to democratically mandated parties. There should be a comprehensive agenda across the totality of relevant relationships. Since March 1991 the Government had been pursuing the process which was described in the statement by the then Secretary of State Peter Brooke on 26 March 1991. That itself had been the product of lengthy discussions with the main parties in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government. They had agreed to make a new beginning and set out the analysis and what were to be described as the Three Strands. It was agreed then that hope of a lasting settlement rested on adequate expression of the totality of relationships.

19. Since then talks had taken place in different formats: there have been bilaterals and round tables. The parties have met individually with Michael Ancram, and the British and Irish Governments had continued to work together. The Government could not anticipate the ground rules which might be agreed for future talks but we were looking to the future and the Government's aim, shared with the Irish, was to agree and publish the Joint Framework Document (which would outline an understanding of what might constitute an acceptable settlement). Once published the JFD would be put to the people and the parties in Northern Ireland and form the basis for subsequent discussions. At the same time we should also bring forward our own proposals on Strand 1. The Government would want to hear as wide a spectrum of views as possible. This would include Sinn Fein's views, added Mr Stephens. This present dialogue would provide an opportunity for Sinn Fein to seek explanation and clarification of the JFD. Thereafter we would hope as rapidly as possible to move to multiparty talks. It was likely there would be preparatory discussions on the document and the ground rules for them. When the prospects for talks seemed good the Government would convene them.

20. Mr McGuinness was grateful for the presentation and said that Sinn Fein delegation would take their notes away. The party's Ard

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Comhairle would consider it also. He wondered whether it would be possible to have a copy of Mr Stephens' remarks and Mr Thomas agreed to send it on. [The Government's paper on ground rules for talks was sent to Sinn Fein by fax on Friday 3 February.]

Social and Economic Issues

21. At 1.20pm Caoimhghin O'Caolain introduced what he described as an outline of Sinn Fein's understanding of the economics of transformation. Speaking confidently Mr O'Caolain proceeded to deliver a crisp lecture. The economy, he said, must underpin the peace process and consolidate it. There should be no contradiction between politics and the economy. The fundamental point was for the British to withdraw from Ireland, but there would have to be a continuing economic commitment - he suggested the term 'reparations' as appropriate - to prevent dislocation and to repair the disadvantages and discrimination caused by British rule. These were not matters, he suggested, which could be satisfactorily resolved in discussions with civil servants. Nevertheless he would outline some elements of Sinn Fein's approach. The objectives of economic policy must be: 1) to provide sustainable development; 2) to make the best use of economic resources - human and physical; and 3) to construct an economic base to reflect all the Irish people.

22. Those objectives were underlined by some principles, he said, and listed sustainable growth, public and private investment, concern for human rights and security of employment and income. Mr O'Caolain said that this analysis suggested that the economic strategy to be adopted must include: a) speedy integration into a single Ireland economy; b) transformation from a war to a peace economy in Northern Ireland; c) moves towards social and economic harmonisation in Ireland; d) the democratization of economic decision making; and e) the rectification of economic distortions caused by partition.

23. As an aside at this point Mr O'Caolain said that he was personally aware as an elected representative from the border area

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of those last problems in particular. Cities had been cut off from their natural winterlands, the development of towns had been hampered by poor communications and so on. Returning to his script he launched into another list of measures which he said would be appropriate. First there was a need to strike an appropriate balance between public and private investment, there should be a review of legislation with the need to construct effective anti-discrimination measures paramount, there should be affirmative action, there should be tax reform, the setting of a minimum wage, an end to security vetting which had particularly hampered initiatives in the voluntary sector, and there must be no bar on competing for public contracts.

24. All of these economic policy measures, he continued, must reflect the need to target the highest priority areas. They needed the inward investment, IDB and LEDU and other bodies involved in that must in particular look at the inner cities, borders and areas west of the Bann. There should also be a special compensation programme for farmers and small businesses, the European Union's so-called Delors package and IFI money must genuinely be additional, and there must be full participation and accountability involving all the people where investment and other development decisions were to be taken.

25. Mr Watkins responded. He said that there would be a lot in the presentation and it would be helpful if we could have it in written form. [A written version of the presentation was handed to the Government team at the end of the following meeting.] At a first hearing, however, he thought there was much to which the Government could assent without qualification. He thought that many of the issues raised had been those of what he described as the right and left of politics rather than British and Irish. We would have to consider the presentation carefully, but he might make a number of points off the cuff.

26. The Government agreed that measures to counter discrimination were very important. This was not just about the two major

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communities in Northern Ireland but went wider than that. He noted new guidelines for Northern Ireland Departments on discrimination for example. On fair employment he said that there was already very powerful legislation on the statute books. Of course fair employment and unemployment were related issues and both had to be looked at. Targeted inward investment was already the Government's policy and although Sinn Fein might argue that we had not got it right it was a guiding principle for the IDB. Indeed Sinn Fein might know that the Government had adopted Targeting Social Need as a key objective, and this was policy applied irrespective of community. Mr O'Caolain had mentioned the need for additionality in EU money. The Prime Minister had already made it clear that the Delors package would be genuinely additional, however, other funds were an issue of United Kingdom macro-economic policy. He agreed that a key objective objective should be to create a bedrock of reliable jobs and that we must maximise the opportunity offered by the current political developments.

27. Mr O'Caolain expressed some surprise at Mr Watkins' agreement with him on so many points. Clearly worried he said that Government should understand that his presentation had not been intended as merely aspirational.... Mr Leach said that he must briefly respond to the point Mr O'Caolain had made about cross border roads. He thought there were differences of opinion about the economic consequences of the closures but now there was a programme in place anyway to reinstate the roads. Mr O'Caolain responded indulgently that economists may differ but his own personal experience told him that the effects had been serious. Now it was inadequate simply to restore the roads. What was needed was affirmative action to bring the roads up to fully modern standards.

Social and Economic and Cultural Issues

28. Mr McGuinness proposed that the next two closely related items on the agenda might be taken together. Bairbre de Brun then spoke for Sinn Fein. They had raised specific issues on previous occasions she said. This time she would talk more generally under a

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number of broad headings. Addressing her gaze for the most part at Mr Watkins - clearly now identified as the Government's culture man - she said that Sinn Fein's general approach was to fostering the Irish language. This was central to the aim of full parity of esteem.

29. In education the Irish medium must have funding and must be nurtured, this would mean support for secondary schools in Derry and Belfast and a right to take public exams in people's own language. In public administration there must be a right to conduct all business in Irish and the Government should use its influence with councils - she mentioned particularly the Belfast City Council - to ensure that this was true for local government too. In the media she cited a comparison with the treatment of Scottish Gaelic and Welsh, and said that cooperation with Telefis naGaelige should be examined and the case for producing other promotional materials looked at. In the arts generally there should be parity in Arts Council funding for Irish culture, and finally there should an accountable Irish Language Board with cross border links. Underpinning all these approaches the Government should sign the European Charter on Minority Languages and engage itself in active promotion and creation of Irish language infrastructure.

30. Again this had been a very helpful presentation, said Mr Watkins, and it would be useful to have it in written form. [A written version of these remarks was also given to the Government team at the end of the following meeting.] The Government's policy was not to discriminate against the Irish language. As he had said before there was an Order before parliament on Irish street names and this should be in force by Easter. Generally the Government was interested in promoting and supporting soundly based projects in this area. We were committed to equal treatment and equal rights, but there was a question he would wish to address to Sinn Fein: 'do you want to move to a fully bilingual society, and if so how could it be achieved, especially when Irish was not (yet) perceived as the common inheritance of all in Northern Ireland?'.

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31. Turning to schools Mr Watkins said that we had talked previously about the Meanscoil and since those discussion the Secretary of State had met the Principal and the Chair of the School, and had said that although he could not revisit the Department of Educations decision he would want to look at bridging funding from other sources and that was being examined now.

32. Mr Watkins wanted to correct some misapprehensions. There was presently no reason not to use Irish in correspondence with Government Departments, but people would have to expect a reply in English - that was a question of efficiency since there were very few Irish speakers in the Civil Service. He understood that it was Post Office policy to deliver mail however it was addressed but he noted again the impending street names Order. As to the points Ms De Brun had made about the media he said there was a BBC fund in Scotland for Gaelic but there was simply no equivalent proposal from the BBC in Northern Ireland. Were one to be made the Government would be open to it, although the Scottish Office had produced he believed £9 million of support and he could not say that any similar level of funding would be available in Northern Ireland. As to Telefis n Gaelige the Government was waiting for proposals from the Irish Government and again would listen to them. He noted Ms De Brun's point about the European Charter and repeated something he had said in a previous meeting. Like the Irish Government we had not yet signed but we had not said that we would not sign. The problem was really one of there being many minority languages in the United Kingdom and this was a genuine difficulty. This he stressed was only a partial response and we would consider what Sinn Fein had said further.

33. Ms de Brun paused before switching to the equality of treatment part of her presentation and Mr O'Caolain in a notable first for the dialogue became the first Sinn Fein speaker to chip in beyond his scripted brief. He wanted to answer Mr Watkins' question about a bilingual society. It was not Sinn Fein policy that this should be obligatory. They believed in choice.

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34. Ms de Brun, slightly ruffled, continued. The question Mr McGuinness had already raised about access to Ministers was one of a series of measures which disadvantaged Sinn Fein. The message consistently being given out was that a vote from Sinn Fein was not of equal value. The Government's attitude to this had repercussions elsewhere. Councils like Craigavon and Belfast tried to use Government policy to exclude Sinn Fein Councillors from business. There was then the matter of political vetting and community groups, the so called Hurd policy, which sent signals to them that they should deal with other parties rather than Sinn Fein. There had been various changes in electoral law and the imposition of an anti violence pledge all of which had been done to discredit Sinn Fein. In spite of this Sinn Fein received 12.5% of the vote at the last local elections but there was still only 1 Sinn Fein representative on any Library or Health Board. Similar signals were given out by the practice at the Housing Executive of logging queries which came from Sinn Fein. All of this amounted to an open demonization of Sinn Fein's representatives indicating that the Government believed that there was an acceptable level of treatment for them which would not be tolerable for other parties. Finally she noted that Sinn Fein Councillors recently had requested meetings with Ministers, but had not even had replies to their letters.

35. Mr Thomas said that he knew there was an outstanding issue of correspondence from Councillors which he would not address in detail but our hope was that Sinn Fein would be treated on all fours with other parties. On the Hurd policy he noted what Ms De Brun had said and said the policy itself was under continuous review.

36. Its being 2pm both sides agreed to an adjournment.

Other Business

37. At 2.25pm the meeting recommenced. In response to an earlier question outside the meeting from Sinn Fein Tony Beeton reported that the Governor at HMP Full Sutton had written to Councillor McGeown that day (first class) to inform him that he had been placed

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on the list of approved visitors and that he could therefore make arrangements accordingly. The Sinn Fein delegation nodded a mute thank you.

38. Mr Thomas then said that he knew that we had agreed two more meetings next week and he would like to schedule one for the following week. Mr McGuinness said that he believed there was agreement that on Tuesday 7 February we would discuss Resolving the Causes of Conflict/Practical Consequences of the Ending of Violence and on Thursday 9 Prisons Issues. Mr Thomas agreed and added that would leave responses to our papers from Sinn Fein and but also our responses to their promised economic paper and Irish language notes. Mr McGuinness said that we would have the option to discuss some of those next week, but there was agreement that Mr Beeton and Ms O'Hanlon should liaise on the question of future dates and agendas.

39. Mr McGuinness then turned to what he described as the day's 'hullabaloo'. Mr Thomas said that the Times story with its leak of the Joint Framework Document appeared to draw on something which was authentic although it was not clear if it was complete. The Government would be emphasising that this was an unauthorised disclosure, and although he himself would not guess at the motive, it was clearly very unhelpful. The Government's objective was to carry forward work on the Joint Framework Document and he saw the need for this not to be disrupted. He was sure the two Governments would press on, he said.

40. Mr McGuinness then presented a short summary of Sinn Fein's position at the meeting. He wanted the Government to recognise Sinn Fein and their electorate fully, it was a question of parity of esteem. There was a high public expectation of meetings with Ministers. That time had now arrived and he would like to see Ministers at the next meeting. The Government had said that Ministers could meet Sinn Fein Councillors, but these present talks were dealing with issues of far greater importance. Mr Thomas said that there was no question of our seeking to stall progress. He

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asked whether this wish to see Ministers at the next meeting would be made public. Mr McGuinness said again that this was not an ultimatum. It was a private point at present but Sinn Fein may at some time feel the need to make it more public. Mr Thomas then read the draft press statement which the Government proposed to issue. Mr McGuinness requested a brief adjournment to consider the text.

41. After the adjournment Mr McGuinness proposed one small amendment to the description of Sinn Fein's position which Mr Thomas accepted. The press statement concluded with the point that the Government had proposed further meetings which Sinn Fein was to consider. Mr McGuinness agreed that Mr Beeton and Ms O'Hanlan should explore the matter further.

42. The meeting closed at 2.50pm.

(singed:)

TONY BEETON

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