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FROM: JACKIE SEAR
SIL
1 DECEMBER 1994

ASST
SEC - 1 DEC 1994
DENT SEC

- PS/Secretary of State (B) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B
- PS/Mr Moss (L&B) - B
- PS/Baroness Denton (L&B) - B
- PS/PUS (L&B) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Blackwell - B
- Mr Daniell - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Wood (L&B) - B
- Mr Shannon - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mrs Collins - B
- Mr Dodds - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mr Marsh - B
- Mr Maxwell - B
- Miss Jude - B
- Mr Brearley - B
- HMA, Dublin - B
- Mr Lamont, RID - B

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Mrs Kenny

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L) - B

OPENING OF EXPLORATORY DIALOGUE WITH SINN FEIN

No 10 will announce at 11.00 am today that the Government will propose an opening meeting with Sinn Fein on Wednesday 7 December.

I attach some lines to take which have been agreed with the Secretary of State.

SIGNED

MRS J O SEAR
SIL DIVISION
1 December 1994

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OPENING OF EXPLORATORY DIALOGUE

Exploratory dialogue to start

On 21 October, the Prime Minister announced that exploratory dialogue would start before Christmas, providing the IRA ceasefire was maintained. Ministers have now asked officials to contact Sinn Fein by letter to propose an opening meeting on Wednesday 7 December in Belfast. The details have yet to be agreed.

At this first meeting the Government will be represented by senior NIO officials acting under political authority and direction.

Purposes of dialogue

The dialogue will be for the purposes set out over a year ago:

- (i) to explore the basis upon which Sinn Fein would come to be admitted to an inclusive political talks process to which the British Government is committed but without anticipating the negotiations within that process;
- (ii) to exchange views on how Sinn Fein would be able over a period to play the same part as the current constitutional parties in the public life of Northern Ireland;
- (iii) to examine the practical consequences of the ending of violence.

So is the IRA ceasefire permanent?

As the Prime Minister said on 21 October, the IRA's actions have been more compelling than their words. He announced then a working assumption that it is intended to be permanent. That continues to be reasonable.

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Practical details (date, place etc?)

These have yet to be agreed with Sinn Fein. We have proposed an opening meeting on 7 December in Belfast. We hope further details can be announced once agreed.

Participants in dialogue?

It is for each side to select its own representatives. At the opening meeting the Government will be represented by senior NIO officials acting under political authority and direction.

Will Ministers join dialogue?

Officials will report closely to the Secretary of State. Ministers may join the dialogue at a suitable point if sufficient progress is made.

Further meetings, how often etc?

A matter for agreement between the two sides.

What will the first meeting discuss?

For agreement between both sides, but we envisage opening statements by each side, discussion of those statements and consideration of the future agenda.

What about dialogue with loyalists?

Prime Minister has said that will also begin before Christmas. There are no firm proposals for dates yet.

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secret contacts been reactivated?

Have nothing to add to the written answer on 9 December 1993. (We do not propose to divulge any further information about messages sent or received or to comment further save to give the assurance that any communications from Her Majesty's Government will be consistent with their publicly stated policies.)

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