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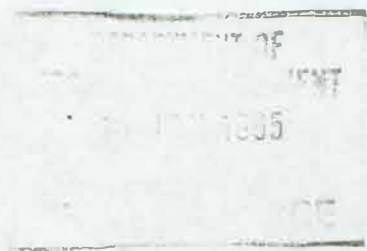
GM 106899/95

Mr Cuthbert
Mr Longley
Mr Hughes

162/52485
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FROM: MICHAEL ANCRAM
16 January 1995

Am important paper. Direct
for file, re. MM. 14/1/95



- cc PS/Sir John Wheeler (DFP, B&L) - B
- PS/Baroness Denton (DED, DANI&L) - B
- PS/Mr Moss (DOE, DHSS&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Wood (B&L) - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Maxwell - B

Mr Longley
Mr Gibson
Mr G...
Mr B...
afid

SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L) - B

Mr T
Rece...
W

MEETING AT DOWNING STREET - 11 JANUARY 1995

When we met the Prime Minister last Wednesday to discuss Northern Ireland affairs, he asked that a single Northern Ireland Office Minister and an official should be made responsible for improving the co-ordination and dissemination of "good news" about Northern Ireland within the Province itself, in GB and internationally. The Prime Minister clearly feels that we should be making greater capital out of the peace process, and that by whatever means we should be getting across to the people of Northern Ireland the genuine economic and social benefits which flow from peace. He has asked for a report on how we are tackling this issue: he may ask for our ideas in the margins of the meeting with the Mayors/Chairmen and Chief Executives/Clerks of the Council on 23 January). You asked me to follow this up.

2. I have discussed the Prime Minister's requirement with Mr Fell and Mr Wood. Essentially we see this initiative breaking down into four broad areas, viz:

- a. economic benefits of peace ie the Peace Dividend, and the corollary of what would be lost if violence returns;
- b. selling role of Government in the Peace initiative. This is to counteract the idea either that our role is passive or grudgingly reactionary. We need to put across the responses that have been made to continuing peace, particularly on the security front. (This could also embrace issues such as any relaxation of rules regarding access by Sinn Fein to Ministers, alternative help for Meanscoil, the Washington Conference, but also eventually some further movement on the security front, including prisoners); and
- c. putting across the message locally, in GB and in the US and Europe that it is the Government which is driving the peace process and not other parties.
- d. shortly we will need to put across the positive aspects and safeguards of the JFD.

We see our approach as twin pronged, ie inside Northern Ireland, but also the UK, US and elsewhere.

3. The first question to address is Ministerial responsibility. As you know, I volunteered at the meeting with the PM to take responsibility. That offer still stands, though I am conscious that other Ministers (not least John Wheeler) have a legitimate interest and carry responsibilities for some of those matters. I have no desire to press upon you any permanent alteration of Ministerial responsibilities in the information area, but if you and other colleagues agree, for the purposes of the exercise proposed by the Prime Minister only, I am willing to act as lead, or co-ordinating

Minister. I have discussed this with John Wheeler and I understand that given the political nature of much of what we will be dealing with he is happy for me to undertake this.

4. I would propose to establish a small working committee of officials, under my Ministerial guidance, to work up a co-ordinated approach aimed at making the maximum possible presentational impact of our policies geared towards embedding the peace process and gaining acceptance for the political process. I suggest that the committee, which would meet on a weekly basis, would be composed of Mr Wood, Mr Williams (as Chairman of SIG), Mr Bell (representing SIL - who will be able to relate in turn to the FCO and the Central Office of Information), and Mr Maxwell, who, with Mr Fell's agreement, will be responsible for co-ordinating the exercise across all of the Departments and Divisions involved. I would aim to supplement the deliberations of the committee on broader presentational issues by involving, on an informed basis, a group of independent "wise men" from the PR/marketing sphere in NI to advise (in an unpaid capacity) on PR as seen from an outsiders' perspective. Among those I have in mind are David Lyle (who has served us so well on the TV advertising campaign, for McCann Ericson), John Laird, Colin Anderson (who impressed the Secretary of State with his ideas at a recent Hillsborough dinner), and George Priestly.

5. The immediate priority for the official committee will be to devise a mechanism whereby we can pick up the "good news" in the pipeline within the Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO which would serve to enhance, within the public perspective, the benefits of peace. It may be that we should institute a 'good news desk' which can collate material and allow us to orchestrate timing of announcements to create maximum scheduled effect within the whole. The committee will also look at boosting the message in the

international arena, particularly in the run up to the Washington conference in May. My firm belief is that the entire Ministerial team will need to play a role in this part of the exercise, including visits to the USA, and perhaps within Europe. A meeting of the Northern Ireland Overseas Information Committee scheduled for early March may also have to be brought forward. In any event the first obligation will be to produce the report which the Prime Minister has asked for.

6. The Committee will require to operate swiftly, concisely, with the minimum of red tape and with authority. It may need to co-ordinate with outside agencies such as the RUC and it will require your imprimatur on its authority to do so. It will also require to be adequately resourced.

7. I am ready to discuss.

Signed

MICHAEL ANCRAM
Minister for Political Affairs

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