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- 1. ~~cc to the Ministers~~
- 2. X.D.

JSW  
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ID/52319  
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**EXPLORATORY DIALOGUE**

The Government has announced that it is ready to begin exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein and has authorized me to invite Sinn Fein to an opening meeting in Parliament Buildings, Belfast. I suggest this might be at 10.30 am on Wednesday 7 December or, if that is not suitable, at some other mutually convenient time or date.

At the opening meeting the Government will be represented by senior officials acting under the political authority and direction of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and within a remit agreed by Ministers collectively. I shall lead the Government team.

The Government intends to approach this dialogue constructively and to do what it can to ensure that the practical arrangements work smoothly. Accordingly, with the need to ensure ready communications between us throughout the process, you might like to note these telephone and fax numbers - Tel: 0585-739057 and Fax: 071-210-6786. In both cases the link will be to Tony Beeton the member of our team who will be providing administrative support.

I propose that our first meeting should deal in the main with considering, and I hope agreeing, the procedures and an initial agenda for the dialogue. It was helpful, in Mr Adams' letter of 24 November, to have notice of some of the specific items Sinn Fein will wish to raise. We envisage that both sides might wish to make and publish a formal opening statement. These opening statements will provide an opportunity for each side to explain its approach to the dialogue. They might be discussed then or in subsequent meetings.

We believe that it will be in the interests of both sides to agree that proceedings in the dialogue remain confidential except where otherwise agreed. This is something which we might also discuss at the opening meeting. I attach a proposed agenda for that meeting.

On matters of housekeeping, we propose to allow around two hours or so for the opening meeting. But, of course, if both sides agree at the time we can change this. In any event the length and tempo of future meetings will be something to be resolved between us.

We would provide parking facilities for you at Parliament Buildings and a room for your drivers and other delegation support. We will also make a delegation room available for your use and we can discuss appropriate access to typing and copying facilities if you wish. We should like to propose that each side has up to six persons on their team, with one from each side to act as notetakers. I am anxious that your arrival should go smoothly and to assist this it will be helpful to know the size and composition of your delegation and support as well as the details of the vehicles you will be using. I should be glad if you or one of your colleagues would pass this information either to me or, better still, to our nominated secretary, Tony Beeton

Yours sincerely,

QUENTIN THOMAS

Proposed Agenda for opening meeting

1. Introductions.
2. Confidentiality of proceedings.
3. Opening Statements
4. Discussion of Opening Statements
5. Agenda and future work plan.
6. Any other business (delegation size etc).
7. Press line.
8. Date of next meeting.