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NC/45/6
11 JUN 1996

FROM: ANGELA DULLAGHAN
PS/Michael Ancram
10 June 1996

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/Baroness Denton (DED, DANI&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
PS/Lady Mayhew
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Hill - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mrs Brown - B
Mr Lavery - B
~~Mr Carson - B~~
Mr Haire, DED

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

WJ 11/6
1. Mr. Stephens - to see
C. For our records

MICHAEL ANCRAM'S MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE NI WOMEN'S COALITION *11/6*

The Minister met Monica McWilliams, Pearl Sagar and Bronagh Hinds of the NI Women's Coalition at 9.30 am on Friday 7 June in Stormont Castle.

2. Ms McWilliams had requested this meeting to have the opportunity of introducing her team to the Minister in advance of the All Party Talks on Monday 10 June. She explained her party's position with regard to the talks and informed the Minister that the Women's coalition wanted to be involved as much as possible in all aspects of the talks process.

Detail

3. The Minister welcomed the delegation and congratulated them on their success at the election. The Minister was delighted that they had made the top ten and he stressed that the Government wanted as wide a representation as possible at the talks.

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4. Ms McWilliams explained how her party had drawn its members from both sides of the community and also considered themselves to be cross-class. They did not want people to think of them as a bunch of middle class, intellectual, elitist women. She explained that the party would be drawing on a lot of expertise from outside bodies during the talks.

5. She went on to explain how disappointed she had been with the performance of Dr Paisley and John Taylor on Newsnight. They had come across as very angry people. Mr Taylor's cry of 'The people have spoken' could no longer stand up as the last word. It was clear from the election result that 'the People' meant a very widespread of opinion. The talks needed to be as inclusionary as possible and without pre-conditions. Ms Sagar concurred with this saying that that was what she had perceived on the ground. Ms McWilliams went on to say that her party had come to the conclusion that Sinn Fein should be included but if they are not there she wanted to make it clear that the Women's Coalition would be there. If any party walks out her party will talk to their contacts and will argue for agreement and accommodation.

6. The Minister pointed out that during the previous talks in 91/92, he was told, a lot of the constructive work had been done in the tea room and in bi-lateral meetings and these took on a momentum of their own. It was always going to be difficult with parties and individuals walking in and out but he took the pragmatic view that they should be left to do this.

7. With regard to Sinn Fein being admitted to the talks the Minister explained that he wanted them to be there but each party must be talking on the same basis. The absence of a ceasefire created an unacceptable pressure.

8. Ms McWilliams said that there were some who would take the view that the talks should have been called before the breakdown of the ceasefire.

9. The Minister explained that a formula had to be found to get everyone to the talks. The Government had talked about elections

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for a long time, the election was not called because of the bomb at Canary Wharf. What was apparent when the bomb went off was that it made a lie of the claim that the IRA ceasefire was permanent.

10. Ms McWilliams stated that she understood this but the fact was that a significant proportion of people would not be represented on Monday. Ms Hinds agreed and said that they would have to agree to differ on this. The soundings she had made on the ground showed that people wanted everyone to talk. The Minister also pointed out that if the ceasefire was reinstated and Sinn Fein were eligible to enter the talks then they would join where the talks had got to.

11. Ms Hinds believed that the UDP and PUP would be used as a yardstick and if it was seen that they had a meaningful role it could be helpful.

12. The Minister explained that Monday would be chaotic. The Government could set out the groundrules but the process belonged to the participants and would create its own dynamic. Mr Maccabe related that in his experience of the last talks communications were set up in all directions between parties and individuals, all creating confidence.

13. Ms McWilliams went on to ask about the decommissioning working group with regard to representation of the smaller parties. The Minister explained that this would depend on the plenary session. It would then be a matter of those involved going off to work on the technicalities of decommissioning. Not all parties wanted to be involved in this. The DUP for example had said that this was a matter for the two Governments only.

14. Ms Hinds indicated that the Women's Coalition were anxious to see if they could have a neutral role on the decommissioning issue. The Minister pointed out that there were no hard and fast rules. He did point out that it would involve a lot of detailed work. Ms McWilliams agreed and explained that the Women's Coalition were used to preparing papers etc and would be drawing on expertise from outside ie, trade unions, voluntary sector, community activists and

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Business people. They were confident they had the resources to get involved at all levels.

15. Ms McWilliams moved on to the question of Chairmen. She was aware that they owed us a response on the chairmanship issue. She told the Minister said she was keen on the idea of an Independent Chairman and was aware of many prominent women internationally who could fill this role.

16. Finally Ms Hinds asked if the talks were likely to carry on through the summer. The Minister stated that the momentum of the process itself would decide.

Signed

ANGELA DULLAGHAN
PS/Michael Ancram

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