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524/97

From the Private Secretary

19 May 1997

*Dear Ken,***VISIT TO NORTHERN IRELAND, 16 MAY**

I should record that the Prime Minister had brief meetings in Armagh with Archbishop Eames and Cardinal Brady, and with Seamus Mallon. In both meetings, the Prime Minister set out his aims and what he would be saying in his speech.

The churchmen stressed the need for the new Government to avoid alienation of any group and to give people the feeling of ownership of the peace process. Both were very worried about Drumcree, although they thought few people wanted a repetition. They were working hard to prevent it. They also underlined the need for others to do more to bring about peace and a settlement, particularly the business community. People simply could not sit back and hope things would happen.

Mallon encouraged the Prime Minister to "go for it now". People should choose whether they were in or out of the process. If they were out, the caravan would have to move on without them. But he was worried about the resumption of the talks. A repetition of the wasted months up to the adjournment would be disastrous. He was content for the Prime Minister to reassure Unionists but asked him not to forget that Nationalists needed reassurance too - consent cut both ways.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

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Northern Ireland Office**CONFIDENTIAL**