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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

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L V Appleyard Esq
Private Secretary to
the Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Downing Street West

2 August 1984

Dear Len,

NORTHERN IRELAND

Attached for information is a note of a discussion which my Secretary of State had on 24 July with our Ambassador to Dublin.

Copies go to Charles Powell (No 10), Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office), Sir Antony Acland, Mr David Goodall and Sir Philip Woodfield and to Robert Andrew, Tony Brennan and Graham Angel here, as well as to Mr Goodison in Dublin.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Sandiford

G K SANDIFORD
Private Secretary

Encl

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PERSONAL SECRETNOTE OF A DISCUSSION WITH HM AMBASSADOR TO THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
ON 24 JULY 1984

Present: Secretary of State
Mr Andrew
Mr Goodison
Mr Sandiford

1. Mr Goodison said that members of the Irish Cabinet were worried about the inter-party talks which were being initiated in Northern Ireland. They feared that the talks would not get anywhere, and by going off at half-cock would preclude any subsequent advance within a larger framework.

2. The Secretary of State said that there appeared to be unreal hopes within the Irish Government about the prospects for progress on an all-Ireland basis. He mentioned that the Irish Ambassador, Mr Dorr, had given an account of the discussions between Sir Robert Armstrong and representatives of the Irish Government which appeared to be unrealistically optimistic about the scope for movement towards joint authority. Sir Robert Armstrong's account of the discussions made clear that nothing beyond consultation was on the table, even as a basis for discussion, and that he had been at pains to make clear that joint authority - in the sense of joint sovereignty - was not a possibility. As one who had attended the discussions, Mr Goodison confirmed that joint authority had been excluded from the range of possibilities.

3. The Secretary of State said that the UK perspective was to see the discussions with the Government of the Republic as a possible route to identifying an Irish dimension acceptable to nationalist opinion (and tolerable to Unionist opinion) which could serve as a necessary ingredient of a settlement within Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State had been given the impression that the Government of the Republic still sought an all-Ireland solution which would leave the Government of the Republic with some measure of respons-

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ibility for the conduct of affairs in Northern Ireland. Mr Goodison commented that he thought Dr FitzGerald did perceive the need to reach agreement on a settlement within Northern Ireland, even if he was also attracted by discussion of the possible scope for movement on an all-Ireland basis.

4. The Secretary of State commented that the Government of the Republic was mistaken, in his view, to attach such importance to reaching agreement on a statement of principles. Agreed principles could only be so widely drawn that they provided no helpful guidance towards agreement on practical measures. Mr Goodison commented that he thought that the Government of the Republic saw no means of reaching agreement on practical measures unless there were first agreement on principles.

5. The Secretary of State said that he did not currently see any occasion to convene a conference. If a position were reached when there appeared to be general acquiescence in proposed arrangements which would provide a stable settlement, then he would not exclude the possibility of a conference to endorse such results. But to convene a conference before such a stage were reached would only be likely to lead to the political parties of Northern Ireland declaring set and intransigent positions. He had been encouraging informal talks among the party leaders, at the same time as the Report Committee of the Assembly was pursuing its task, because he believed that that was the best way of maintaining flexibility and avoiding the declaration of set positions.

6. Mr Goodison said that the view in the Republic appeared to be that the Secretary of State had set 23 or 24 August as a deadline for the outcome of discussions between the party leaders. There was also a fear that the Secretary of State, expecting to leave Northern Ireland soon, would make a precipitate attempt to erect a structure within Northern Ireland which would not, in the event, endure.

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7. The Secretary of State commented that it was totally unreal to suppose that the political leaders would reach any kind of agreement by the end of August. He had indicated to the political leaders that he would wish to see them again before the end of August, but that would be merely to see whether any significant contacts at all had taken place. He thought that the Government of the Republic was expecting far too much political change far too quickly. The Irish Government appeared to be deluding itself by identifying and paying attention only to those parts of the Secretary of State's speech in the Forum debate which suited their book, and ignoring the rest.

8. The Secretary of State said that the Irish Government also appeared to be building disproportionate hopes on the implications of the suggested amendment of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution. He understood that amendment of the constitution would hardly be possible unless the Irish Government could present it as part of a much larger package; but it did not follow, either necessarily or in fact, that a package of the size the Irish Government would like to see would become possible.

9. In conclusion, the Secretary of State assured Mr Goodison that he could inform the Irish Government that he had no wish to proceed with undue haste in Northern Ireland; that his encouragement of talks among the party leaders was, in his judgment, the best way of avoiding the declaration of fixed positions; and that he had no wish to hold back from any progress which could usefully and properly be made towards a solution within Northern Ireland.

Cranham Sandiford

G K SANDIFORD

1 August 1984

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