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10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

8 December 1988

Dear Lynn,

POSTPONEMENT OF PRESIDENT GORBACHEV'S VISIT

The Soviet Ambassador called on the Prime Minister at 0845 this morning, having previously spoken to me on the telephone at about 0700, to deliver an oral message from President Gorbachev about the postponement of his visit. I have already sent you the text.

Mr. Zamyatin said that Mr. Gorbachev deeply regretted that the visit to the United Kingdom could not take place as planned in view of the necessity for him to return home urgently to deal with the aftermath of the earthquake in Armenia. As the Prime Minister would be aware, this was a great tragedy which had caused very considerable loss of life including the destruction of two large towns. There were no authoritative casualty figures yet, but it seemed likely that thousands, or even tens of thousands, of people had been killed. Extraordinary measures were being taken to deal with the situation and it was necessary for Mr. Gorbachev to be on hand to direct the efforts. Mr. Gorbachev wished to underline that he was of course only postponing the visit and hoped that new dates could be agreed within a reasonable time.

The Prime Minister expressed her deep sympathy for the victims of the earthquake and said that she entirely understood the reasons why Mr. Gorbachev had to return immediately to the Soviet Union. People here would of course be disappointed but would look forward to welcoming Mr. and Mrs. Gorbachev on another occasion. The Prime Minister then handed over the text of a message to Mr. Gorbachev, a copy of which you have already received. The Prime Minister added that we would be ready to provide any emergency assistance which could be of help, such as blankets, drugs and food and could fly them direct into the affected area if the Soviets so wished. We were also raising the matter straightaway in the European Community and calling for a European relief effort. Mr. Zamyatin said that the Soviet Prime Minister and three senior members of the Government were already in the area but he had no instructions yet as to whether outside help would be welcome. But he was very grateful for the offer.

The Prime Minister continued that she hoped Mr. Gorbachev would let us know when he would like to reinstate the visit and we would do our best to meet his convenience. His speech at the United Nations the previous day, which she had warmly welcomed, made it all the more important that they should talk soon. If necessary, she would be prepared to make a very brief visit to Moscow to have such a talk in advance of Mr. Gorbachev's visit to the United Kingdom being reinstated. Mr. Zamyatin said he would convey this point as well. He wished to express the Soviet authorities' thanks for all the hard work which had gone into the preparation for Mr. Gorbachev's visit. It would provide the foundations for the future visit.

Yours sincerely,
Chris Powell

(C.D. POWELL)

Lyn Parker, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.