



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

29 November 1984

Dear Aunt,

Thank you for your letter of 22 November. I had indeed noted and appreciated the trouble you took to make sure that your presentation, both at your press conference and in the Dail, followed the lines which we had agreed together at Chequers and, as you say, I was careful to do the same at my own press conference and in the House of Commons. I share your concern that my references to the Forum Report and the situation of the minority community in Northern Ireland have been taken totally out of context.

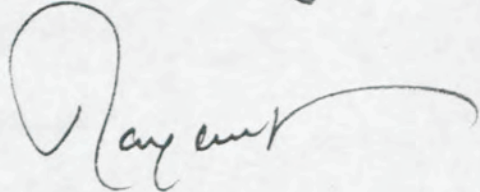
As regards the Forum Report, when I was explicitly asked at my press conference whether the British Government had ruled out the three models put forward in Chapters 6-8 of the Report, I was bound to reaffirm that none of these models is acceptable to us. There was nothing new in that: it was made clear by Jim Prior in his speech in the House of Commons on 2 July, and I reaffirmed it to you when we met in London at the beginning of September. If I had been asked for my view on the Forum Report as a whole, I should certainly have endorsed Jim Prior's references to those elements in the Report which we found helpful. I acknowledge how much personal effort and commitment you yourself have put into the search for an acceptable way forward.

As to alienation, you will know from our talks both in London and at Chequers that I think that the unqualified use of this term is liable to exacerbate the problem which it purports to describe. There is a danger that people

will overlook the measures which British Governments have taken in Northern Ireland in recent years to safeguard the rights of both communities, and the extent to which members of the nationalist minority are involved in the institutions of the province. But I do not dispute that, though many members of the minority community support the existing system and work within it - for instance as members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and in other parts of the public service - there are members of the minority community in Northern Ireland who do not have confidence in the system of authority and law and order and who look to the Republic, and therein lies the problem which both of us are trying to resolve.

I share your own conviction that our joint search for ways of promoting lasting peace and stability in Northern Ireland must continue. Neither of us underestimates the difficulties; but I thought that our talks at Chequers were valuable in helping to approach the problems realistically, and the goodwill between us is a solid foundation on which to build. For our part, we are reflecting carefully on the ground covered in the Chequers talks, and I hope that we shall be able before long to let you have an indication of the areas which we believe that it would be fruitful to explore further with you.

I look forward to seeing you at the European Council.

Yours sincerely


Dr. Garret FitzGerald, TD.