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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

30 March 1985

Dear Len,

MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE TAOISEACH
IN BRUSSELS ON SATURDAY 30 MARCH 1985 AT 0925

The Prime Minister met the Taoiseach this morning shortly before the start of the second day of the European Council in Brussels. Dr. FitzGerald was accompanied by Mr. Nally and Mr. Lillis. Sir Robert Armstrong was also present.

Anglo-Irish Relations: Northern Ireland

The Taoiseach said that there had been useful discussions between British and Irish Ministers in Dublin last week. These had clarified areas still needing discussion at official level. Despite the 'static' following the Chequers summit, progress had been made in adjusting expectations on both sides. The Chequers communiqué remained the point of departure and opened up real opportunities for progress, although he recognised that there were also risks. He would be interested in the Prime Minister's assessment of the prospects.

The Prime Minister agreed that progress had been made in adjusting expectations, though reaction to the Taoiseach's recent speech in London had been something of a setback. It had upset the Unionists as had also an article in the Sunday Mail, in response to which it had been necessary for the Northern Ireland Secretary to issue a statement. The Taoiseach said that he had been somewhat taken aback by the amount of press briefing that appeared to be going on by the British side on the progress of the Anglo-Irish talks. He could understand why some briefing was needed but altogether too much was being said. The Prime Minister said that she had not authorised any briefing of the press.

The Prime Minister continued that her main concern was at the lack of progress in the talks between the parties in Northern Ireland. There had been no sign that the SDLP were ready to involve themselves seriously in discussions on devolution. If the United Kingdom and the Irish Governments were to reach agreement on an Anglo-Irish dimension, it would be essential for there to be an assurance that the Nationalist minority would take part fully in moves towards

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devolution. The Taoiseach said that he could assure the Prime Minister that the SDLP would be willing to play a part. But they wanted to see progress, first, towards establishing an Anglo-Irish dimension. The SDLP's concern was exactly the opposite of the British Government's: they feared that if they became involved in talks and made progress towards devolution, HMG might say that there was no need for an Anglo-Irish dimension. Furthermore, the timing was difficult because of the approach of the May local elections. But he could say with authority that the SDLP were willing to contemplate an exercise in devolution if the Unionists behaved reasonably and the Anglo-Irish talks succeeded in creating the right framework.

The Prime Minister said that it was essential, as part of any agreement on a consultative role for the Republic in the North, that the Irish Government should make a firm statement about the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. Of course a referendum to amend the Irish constitution would be better still but she recognised the difficulties of this. The Taoiseach agreed that there should be a formal declaration which should be incorporated in any agreement and should use words that would not be subject to legal challenge in the Republic. The Sunningdale formula might serve.

Turning to other issues under discussion by officials, the Taoiseach said that the Irish Government were waiting for formal comments on their amendments to the British paper of 21 January. There was a particular point which he hoped we would look at further and that was Joint Courts. The Prime Minister commented that Lord Lowry was strongly against these and had said as much to the Taoiseach. The Taoiseach acknowledged this but pointed out that Joint Courts could be an important step towards acceptance of any agreement by the Nationalists. He wondered whether Lord Lowry's opposition would be so strong if he appreciated the wider context in which the idea had been launched.

The Taoiseach continued that he also hoped that the Prime Minister would consider various suggestions which the Irish Government had made for confidence building measures, particularly in relation to policing. It was unacceptable that there should be areas such as Creggan where 13,000 people had to live without postal services because no police protection could be provided. He wondered whether in areas such as these there could be local unarmed community police forces. They would be part of the police, but acceptable to the local communities. He was not suggesting that the role of the RUC should be reduced but that there must in addition be local policemen on the beat. He wanted to leave the idea with the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister said that clearly there would be difficulties: we needed to avoid any impression of establishing vigilantes but she would seek the RUC's views on the proposal.

The Taoiseach repeated that he would like to continue work with the aim of a further summit in early June. The Prime Minister said it would be a mistake to fix a date,

although she would be prepared to earmark one privately in her diary. The essential thing was that we must know exactly what was going to be achieved at a further summit before fixing a date. The communiqué must be worked out and agreed in advance. The Taoiseach said he absolutely agreed with the Prime Minister on these points, but stuck to his hope for early June.

Contributions from the United States to Irish Causes

The Prime Minister said that during a recent talk with the Mayor of San Fransisco, she had conceived the idea of a fund for charitable purposes in Ireland as a whole to which those in the United States who wished to give money to Irish causes could contribute. The purpose would be to divert funds which would otherwise go to NORaid. She did not see this as cutting across the ideas of a reconstruction fund which already featured in the Anglo-Irish talks. The Taoiseach said that a similar idea was being floated by backbenchers in his own party in Ireland. He was a bit sceptical although he agreed with the aim of constructive fund-raising. He had raised the subject of American financial support for both Northern Ireland and the Republic in the wake of an agreement with Tip O'Neill who had seemed favourably disposed. The Taoiseach added that, in his view, any contribution by the United States should be matched by the European Community. The Prime Minister agreed that this was a sensible aim.

Press Statement

The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach agreed that they would use the following line in briefing the press:

"The Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, and the Prime Minister the Right Honourable Mrs Margaret Thatcher had a brief meeting in the margins of the European Council in Brussels today.

"They reviewed progress on the dialogue agreed between them at their meeting in Chequers last year which has been conducted at Ministerial and official level. They agreed that there was real merit in continuing with the process. It is, however, not possible at this stage to predict the eventual outcome."

The Taoiseach consulted the Prime Minister about an invitation which he had received from a group of backbench Conservative MPs ("Nick's Diner") to address them. The Prime Minister said that there would be a risk of stirring up Unionist anxieties: she thought the Taoiseach ought to be very cautious.

The Prime Minister again complimented the Taoiseach on the action he had taken to stop the transfer of funds to the IRA. This had been a brilliantly successful operation.

The meeting ended at 0955.

SECRET AND PERSONAL

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I am copying this letter to Jim Daniell (Northern Ireland Office) and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours sincerely
C.D. Powell

C.D. POWELL

L.V. Appleyard, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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