



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

13 September 1985

Dear Mr. Paisley,

Thank you for your joint letter of 28 August about our talks with the Irish Government.

I am convinced that the present dialogue with the Irish Government represents our best hope of improving cooperation in a number of areas including security and of promoting enduring peace and stability in Northern Ireland. The Government's aim is an agreement from which both countries and all parts of the community in Northern Ireland would derive benefits.

I understand your concern about the continuing confidentiality of our discussions. But if the dialogue is to have a chance of producing useful results, it must remain confidential until it reaches a conclusion. I hope this will not take very long now. And I can assure you that, whether the talks succeed or fail, the outcome will be fully and publicly announced and Parliament will have an opportunity for debate.

I can also repeat my unqualified assurance that sovereignty over Northern Ireland will be undiminished. You asked what I mean by this. I mean first that Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom for as long as the majority in the Province so wish; and secondly that whatever may emerge from our discussions with the Irish authorities, responsibility for the government of Northern Ireland will remain with UK Ministers accountable to

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Parliament. I hope that you for your part will accept that it must be the Government of the United Kingdom and Parliament that determine the policy to be adopted in respect of relations with other countries, including the Republic of Ireland.

Your letter also called on us to challenge the Government of the Republic to withdraw its territorial claim and recognise Northern Ireland's right to self-determination. You will be aware that the Irish Government has accepted that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland cannot change without the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland and that that consent is not forthcoming at the present time.

Finally, I welcome your readiness in principle to cooperate with the Republic as members of a future devolved government in Northern Ireland and to consider proposals for the protection of minority interests. We would certainly hope that any future devolved administration would work closely with the Irish Republic on matters of mutual concern, as in the past. And I know that Tom King, who I gather has already written to you about a meeting, is anxious to pick up where Douglas Hurd left off in exploring possible ways in which devolved government could be restored to Northern Ireland on a basis that is acceptable to both sides of the Community there. We would be happy to consider in the light of this criterion any proposals you may have for devolved government.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

The Reverend Ian Paisley, M.P.



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The Rt. Hon. James Molyneux, J.P., M.P.