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From: Philippa Leslie-Jones
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~~MR LYNE~~

John

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**PRIME MINISTER'S CONVERSATION WITH THE NORTHERN
IRELAND SECRETARY, 28 JANUARY**

The Prime Minister had a 15-minute telephone conversation with the Northern Ireland Secretary at Sir Patrick's request at 3.30 this afternoon.

The Northern Ireland Secretary explained that there was a difficulty over the language of the communique which was to issue following that day's IGC. The Irish Government believed that any indication that the two Governments would be participating in intensified talks in advance of the Sinn Fein conference on 26 February would give those who did not wish to accept the Joint Declaration additional ammunition to work against acceptance. Sir Patrick had explained our own constraints in respect of the Unionists; they needed evidence that we were moving to talks with focus and direction.

The Northern Ireland Secretary ran over the sort of language which might be in the communique, largely drawn from the wording of the Joint Declaration. The compromise language proposed on the talks process was along the lines that Ministers confirmed their commitment to pursue the process with the objective of covering each of the three relationships; they underlined the urgency and importance of the search for political agreement and agreed that both Governments would continue their intensive contacts on this issue. The Northern Ireland Secretary thought this formula would allow us to go ahead with discussions on Strand 1. The alternative to a compromise might be to expose a rift between us and the Irish.

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The Prime Minister said that that would be the worst of all. He would settle for the compromise language. But if the Irish Government were not careful they would find they had boxed us into a position where we would have to go ahead with Strand 1 alone. They should be made aware of that. The Prime Minister was not so much worried about the language on intensification of the talks, but he was concerned about the prospect of the Irish Government and the Unionists setting mutually incompatible conditions for the talks.

It was agreed that the Northern Ireland Secretary would accept a formula along the lines proposed, and aim to present the outcome of the IGC in a positive light with Dick Spring. At the same time he should impress upon Spring that we would have to continue our own talks with the Northern Irish Parties. If the Irish Government were not prepared to talk to them, we would put our own ideas to them.

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