



Northern Ireland Office
Castle Buildings
Belfast BT4 3SG

Professor Monica McWilliams
Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
The Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3SX

11 February 2000

Dear Monica,

As you know I have made a Commencement Order under the Northern Ireland Act 2000. From midnight tonight the Assembly and the Executive will be suspended and Northern Ireland will be returned to direct rule. I regret that this has had to happen so soon after devolution had begun. However, the alternative would have been to see the institutions collapse and I believe this would not have been the wish of the people of Northern Ireland, who wanted to see the devolved government working on their behalf.

The purpose of this letter is to let you know how I plan to take things forward. During the period of suspension Assembly members remain in place but the Assembly and its committees cannot meet or conduct business; those in elected office – Ministers, Junior Ministers and Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of statutory committees will no longer hold office; the provisions allowing members of the Executive to participate in the North/South Ministerial Council and British-Irish Council are suspended; no functions can be conferred on implementation bodies. Direct rule will be reinstated but, with Parliament's approval, devolved government can be restored at any time.

I will be in contact with the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland parties next week to discuss the way forward. There will be a review under the terms of the Agreement. I hope that this will allow the period of suspension to come to an end as quickly as possible, thereby enabling legislative functions to be restored to the Northern Ireland Ministers and the Assembly.

PETER MANDELSON