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SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

Dr John Alderdice
55 Knock Road
BELFAST

14 March 1991

Dear John,

1. Brian Mawhinney has explained to you the background to the Government's decision to bring the present phase of talks about talks to a conclusion.
2. Your own party has of course consistently argued that the proposed talks should take place and raised no major objections to the proposed framework, though I have borne in mind the comments which you have made at the various stages of this process.
3. The conclusion I have drawn from my recent round of discussions is that there does now exist a basis on which formal talks could properly be launched. I attach the text of a statement which I might make which reflects the Government's best judgement as to what that basis should be.
4. I should explain the footing on which I am offering this text. I am willing, on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, to make this statement, and to convene talks, if the others who would be involved concur. I do not myself believe I can make greater progress in bridging the gaps between the various potential participants on the important, but essentially preliminary, issues we have been addressing. Accordingly, while



the present text may not be regarded as ideal by any participant, I do not intend to amend the text or to have further negotiations on it. It represents our judgement about what can be done: I hope others will accept it on the basis that I take final responsibility for it.

5. Having said that, I do believe the text accommodates the important interests of all concerned, and that it safeguards the essential points of principle which I know participants have been quite properly anxious to protect. Though I myself take responsibility for the text, it represents the outcome of a collective process lasting over a year, and you and others will recognise your own contribution to the process, and indeed many of the words. Against this background, I hope that you, and the others involved, will consider it with care, and will come to share my judgement that a proper way forward is now available to us. It remains my view that holding formal talks on this basis would be in the interest of all those in these islands whom, together, we represent.

6. If you and the other potential participants in the talks tell me by 26 March that you have no objections, I would be able to make this statement to the House of Commons before the Easter recess. If I am unable to make this statement because one of the potential participants is not satisfied that it represents an acceptable basis for formal talks I will in any event need to inform the House where matters stand and - to that end - to release the text as a record of the conclusions which the Government had drawn from the exchanges which I have had with the Northern Ireland parties and the Irish Government over the past 14 months.



7. I am sending copies of the text to Jim Molyneaux, Ian Paisley and John Hume, and the Prime Minister has written to the Taoiseach. I am announcing this in the House this afternoon but I do not intend to publish the text at this stage, because this is a matter on which the parties should be allowed the courtesy and benefit of an opportunity to consult in order to reach a considered view. Obviously, if a misleading version of the text or this letter were to be made available to the media, I would reserve the right to publish the full texts in order to avoid misrepresentation.

8. I should be glad to meet you and your colleagues at any time to explain my thinking or to receive your formal response or to discuss what the next steps might be, following acceptance of the text as a basis for talks. I should, in any event, be most grateful to hear from you by 26 March at the latest.

Yours sincerely
Peter Brooke

PB

**PROPOSED STATEMENT**

1. Mr Speaker, I am pleased to be able to inform the House that, following extensive discussions with the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland (the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party) and with the Irish Government, a basis for formal political talks now exists. I frankly acknowledge to the House that this would not have been possible without the goodwill and determination of the Northern Ireland parties and the helpful and constructive approach taken by the Irish Government. The stated positions of all these parties are well known. Her Majesty's Government reaffirms its position that Northern Ireland's present status as a part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people.

2. The endeavour on which we have all agreed to embark is an ambitious one. We are setting out to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands. While a successful outcome cannot be guaranteed in advance, I am confident that all the potential participants are committed to a forward-looking and constructive approach. For their part, the two signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement - the British and Irish Governments - have made clear that they would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based agreement or structure if such an arrangement can be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all of the parties concerned.

3. To allow an opportunity for such a wider political dialogue the two Governments have agreed not to hold a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference between two pre-specified dates. All of the parties concerned will make use of this interval for intensive discussions to seek the new and more broadly based agreement which I have just described.



4. As the Conference will not be meeting between the specified dates the Secretariat at Maryfield will accordingly not be required for that period to discharge its normal role of servicing Conference meetings provided for in Article 3 of the Agreement.

5. It is accepted that discussions must focus on three main relationships: those within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; among the people of the island of Ireland; and between the two Governments. It is common ground between all the parties that hope of achieving a new and more broadly based agreement rests on finding a way to give adequate expression to the totality of the relationships I have mentioned.

6. Talks will accordingly take place in three strands corresponding respectively to the three relationships. Some arrangement will be needed for liaison between the different strands of these complex discussions. All the Northern Ireland parties will participate actively and directly in the North-South discussions. The Unionist parties have made clear that they wish their participation in those talks to be formally associated with my presence and that they will regard themselves as members of the United Kingdom team.

7. It is accepted by all those involved that, so as to make full use of the interval between meetings of the Conference to achieve an overall agreement satisfactory to all, it will be necessary to have launched all three sets of discussions within weeks of each other.

8. A first step towards getting related discussions under way in all three strands will be the opening, as soon as possible, of substantive talks between the parties in Northern Ireland under my chairmanship. These will commence with a round of bilateral meetings before moving on, as soon as possible, into plenary



sessions. It has been agreed by all the participants that before long, when, after consultation, I judge that an appropriate point has been reached, I will propose formally that the other two strands should be launched. My judgement as to timing will be governed by the fact that all involved have agreed that the three sets of discussions will be under way within weeks of each other.

9. The internal talks, like the talks in the other strands, will follow a demanding and intensive schedule. In order to ensure a full airing of the issues, it will be open to each of the parties to raise any aspect of these relationships including constitutional issues, or any other matter which it considers relevant. All concerned have assured me that they will participate in good faith and will make every effort to achieve progress.

10. It is accepted by all the parties that nothing will be finally agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole and that confidentiality will be maintained thereunto. However, in the final analysis the outcome will need to be acceptable to the people.