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SECRETARY OF STATE  
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Dr John Alderdice  
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*Dear John,*

I am grateful that you have responded positively to the suggestion in my letter last evening that there should be a meeting of the four party leaders, under my Chairmanship, to see whether we can resolve the outstanding obstacles to fresh talks. As I understand that we can all be in the House on Monday 27 January I propose that we meet there at 2.15 pm.

I am writing to clarify the issues which I should like us to discuss. The main obstacle to agreement on a basis for fresh talks arises from the difference of view over the extent to which there could be a commitment to resume talks after the election. The uncertainties over the outcome of the election, on the one hand, and the need, on the other, for the talks process to have a reasonable chance of continuing to a conclusion, provide understandable obstacles to progress now. I should like us to consider this difficulty at the meeting to see whether a way round it can be found.

If we are able to do so we might then discuss the format and venues for strand 1 of any fresh talks. No-one has indicated to me that these issues raise points of principle so I am hopeful that they could be resolved in face-to-face discussion.



Should it prove impossible to resolve these outstanding issues then, as I said in my earlier letter, I hope that we shall be able to consider together, in the spirit which prevailed on 2 and 3 July, the implications for the political process and for Northern Ireland more generally in the period before the election.

I have written in similar terms to the other party leaders.

*J  
Lons  
Pain*

PB

