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# Facsimile Cover Sheet

to Dr Alderdice

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from Simon Rogers

cc \_\_\_\_\_

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MINISTER TO JOIN EXPLORATORY DIALOGUE WITH SINN FEIN

Following intensive exchanges with Sinn Fein the Government believes that a sufficient basis now exists for the entry of Ministers into the exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein.

The purposes of the Government's exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein have been: to explore the basis upon which Sinn Fein would come to be admitted to an inclusive political talks process; to exchange views on how Sinn Fein would be able, over a period, to play the same part as other parties in the public life of Northern Ireland; and to examine the practical consequences of the ending of violence.

Ministers have needed to be clear, as with the loyalist parties, that, if and when they take part, constructive discussion - particularly in achieving substantial progress on the decommissioning of arms - would be facilitated and accelerated by their joining the dialogue.

The Government has made clear that, once Ministers join the dialogue, there will first need to be a substantive discussion, as a separate issue, on decommissioning of arms, including an exploration of the specific ways this can best be achieved. In reply, Sinn Fein have said that they will discuss, in a serious and constructive manner, any issue which the Government wishes to raise, including decommissioning of arms, with a view to seeking a resolution of this and all relevant issues.

The Government has reiterated that no subject is excluded from the dialogue. It will be glad to explain its policy and approach on any subject. Sinn Fein have made clear their wish to raise a number of issues, including those arising from the need for what they term "demilitarisation".

The Government has told Sinn Fein that the understandings set out in the Government's letters, reflected in this statement, provide a basis for Ministerial contacts in the exploratory dialogue. The Government has therefore proposed that a meeting should be held on this basis as soon as it can be arranged, at which the Minister of State, Michael Ancram, M.P., would lead the Government team.