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SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

Professor Monica McWilliams MLA
NIWC
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

4 February 2000

To Monica,

I enclose a copy of the Statement I made to the House of Commons last night, together with a copy of the Bill which is being published today.

As I explained in my Statement, we are working intensively with the Irish Government and other parties to see if there is a basis to rebuild confidence in the institutions, to enable devolution and the other institutions to continue, and to ensure that decommissioning starts. But if, despite our best efforts, it becomes clear that because of a loss of confidence the institutions cannot be sustained, the Government have to be ready to put on hold the operation of those institutions. Our purpose, if it comes to this, will be to preserve them from collapse and to create the time and space in which to rebuild the confidence required to sustain them.

Once passed, the Bill will therefore enable me to bring suspension into effect by means of a commencement order under clause 9(2) – an order which, under clause 7(4), requires no Parliamentary procedure. We intend



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to complete all the Parliamentary stages of the Bill, secure Royal Assent and, if it still proves necessary, make such a commencement order and bring the Act into force by the end of next week. But, in the meantime, even at this very late stage it is right that we and all the parties continue to see whether there is a basis on which the institutions can continue to operate and decommissioning start.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Mandelson'.

PETER MANDELSON



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