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SECRETARY OF STATE
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Dr John Alderdice
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Dear John,

I am grateful to you for your cooperation in helping us to make sensible and generally acceptable administrative arrangements for the talks. John Chilcot will be writing to you as early as possible next week about a range of detailed points. I thought that I ought to write to you in advance of that about the position we have reached on timing and the frequency of meetings.

I propose that talks in the first strand begin on Tuesday 30 April with the bilateral discussions mentioned in my statement on 26 March. I suggest that I meet the SDLP at 10.30am on Tuesday 30 April, you at 2.30pm that day and the Unionist parties at 10.30am on Wednesday 1 May. It is generally understood that a period of no less than ten weeks is available for the talks. I propose that, during my absence in the USA next week, Brian Mawhinney issues a public statement about these details, including the ten weeks point. Perhaps you would telephone John Chilcot early next week if you wish to raise any points about these detailed proposals.

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On frequency of meetings, different views were expressed by different parties. Although it may not be anyone's first preference I think that it would best meet everyone's concerns for us to clear our diaries for meetings on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays in the expectation that, to begin with at least, meetings are likely to be confined to daytime sessions on the first three days of the week. We might of course need to hold meetings at short notice in the evenings or on Thursdays or Fridays if it became clear that that would be helpful.

In the first week some of us will in any case have to be in London on the Thursday for Northern Ireland questions, but because Monday 6 May is a public holiday I suggest that we plan to keep the following Thursday clear in case we need to meet then.

It will, of course, be open to us to reconsider our own pattern of work in an early plenary session.

John Chilcot has reported to me on your views on how - if at all - the media should be facilitated during the talks. While I can give the assurance that they will NOT be allowed into Parliament Buildings, my professional advisers, who are already holding off numerous media enquiries about facilities, advise that, whether we like it or not, there will be a substantial media presence in the environs of the Stormont Estate. What I propose therefore is to offer them some temporary buildings in one of the car parks which will serve to keep them away from all the participants. Members of delegations will be able to leave Parliament Buildings, get into motor cars and leave the Stormont Estate without having to run the