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SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

Dr John Alderdice
88 University Street
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/ December 1993

Dear John:

MESSAGES BETWEEN THE IRA AND THE GOVERNMENT

Since my statement in the House on Monday, allegations have been made by the IRA leadership that it was the British Government who initiated the exchange of messages and was seeking advice. These allegations are entirely false. The first message was the one received on 22 February originating from the IRA.

I need to write to you, however, to say that in rechecking the documentation some transcription and typing errors have come to light in the dossier of messages between the IRA and the Government which I placed in the Library and Vote Office on 29 November. These do not change the sense of the messages, but nonetheless they should be corrected. The House of Commons must have fully authentic documents, and mistakes in a Statement must not go uncorrected.

I am enclosing a list of the necessary corrections together with the text, thus corrected, of the 9 paragraph message from the British Government despatched on 19 March which I read out in my statement.



These errors arose from the speed with which the dossier had to be completed and checked in Northern Ireland on Sunday, following the decision that day that it should be published in the House contemporaneously with my Parliamentary Statement on Monday.

The corrections cast no doubt whatsoever upon the authenticity of the original message of 22 February from the IRA leadership, which I read out in the House and which said: "The conflict is over but we need your advice on how to bring it to a close". As I said in my Statement, this came from Martin McGuinness. Equally, the Government, notwithstanding allegations by Sinn Fein to the contrary, has no reason to doubt the authenticity of the message sent by the IRA leadership on 2 November which I also read to the House, together with the Government's reply of 5 November.

Nor does the need for corrections of the transcription errors in paragraph 3 of the 9 paragraph note carry the implication, as has been suggested in the press today, that it was the Government rather than the IRA leadership which was seeking advice. The advice referred to in that paragraph is the advice sought in the IRA message of 22 February. The speaking note accompanying the 9 paragraph note, published in the dossier and first printed in the Observer, makes it entirely clear that the British message gives "substantive advice in response to the initial message", which is indeed the case.

Although they do not carry the implications claimed, I very much regret that these corrections need to be made. You should plainly have them as quickly as possible. I



naturally accept full Ministerial responsibility for the inaccuracies. I am placing copies of this letter and enclosures in the Library and the Vote Office. I will confirm the corrections in a written Answer tomorrow.

Copies of this letter are being sent to all Northern Ireland MPs and spokesmen in both Houses, and will be released to the press once the papers have been placed in the Library and Vote Office.

*James Erwin
Falkirk*

MESSAGES PASSED BETWEEN HMG AND THE PROVISIONAL MOVEMENT, FEBRUARY AND NOVEMBER 1993

List of Corrections

1. Provisionals' message of 22 February 1993

Line 5 delete 'misinterpret' and insert 'misrepresent', and after 'as' delete 'a'. These were typographical errors.

2. British message of 26 February

Line 5 after 'substantive' delete 'reply' and insert 'response'. This was a typographical error.

3. British nine paragraph note of 19 March 1993 (transcription was mistakenly made from a late draft)

(a) Paragraph 3

Line 3 delete 'We note that what' and insert 'What'

Line 4 after 'advice', delete 'and', replace the comma with a point and insert 'The position of the British Government is'

Line 4 after 'dialogue' delete 'would' and insert 'could only'

Line 5 after 'follow' delete 'an unannounced' and insert 'a'

Line 5 after 'activity' insert 'It is understood that in the first instance this would have to be unannounced.'

Line 5 after the preceding insertion delete 'we confirm that'

Line 7 after 'then' insert 'progressive entry into'

(b) Paragraph 6 line 3 after 'any' insert 'such'.

(c) Paragraph 7 line 6 after 'but' insert 'this can'. After 'only' insert 'be'.

(d) Paragraph 9

Line 2 after 'for' delete 'the' and insert 'a'. After 'forward' delete 'We are ready to' and insert 'The British Government would'.

Line 3 delete 'to'

4. Provisionals' message 14 August 1993

Paragraph 5 line 3 after 'end' insert 'The purpose of a dialogue about peace is to bring all organised violence by all parties to the conflict to an end.' This was a typographical error.

5. British message 3 September 1993

Paragraph 4 line 4 after 'shows' delete 'then' and insert 'that'. This was a typographical error.

6. Provisionals' message 2 November 1993

Paragraph 2

Line 6 after 'through' insert 'the Link'

Line 7 after 'to' insert 'the'

Line 8 after 'including' insert 'both'.

These were typographical errors.

British 9-paragraph note, sent on 19 March 1993

1. The importance of what has been said, the wish to take it seriously, and the influence of events on the ground, have been acknowledged. All of those involved share a responsibility to work to end the conflict. No one has a monopoly of suffering. There is a need for a healing process.
2. It is essential that there should be no deception on either side, and also that no deception should, through any misunderstanding, be seen where it is not intended. It is also essential that both sides have a clear and realistic understanding of what it is possible to achieve, so that neither side can in the future claim that it has been tricked.
3. The position of the British Government on dealing with those who espouse violence is clearly understood. This is why the envisaged sequence of events is important. What is being sought at this stage is advice. The position of the British Government is that any dialogue could only follow a halt to violent activity. It is understood that in the first instance this would have to be unannounced. If violence had genuinely been brought to an end, whether or not that fact had been announced, then progressive entry into dialogue could take place.
4. It must be understood, though, that once a halt to activity became public, the British Government would have to acknowledge and defend its entry into dialogue. It would do so by pointing out that its agreement to exploratory dialogue about the possibility of an inclusive process had been given because - and only because - it had received a private assurance that organised violence had been brought to an end.
5. The British Government has made clear that:

- no political objective which is advocated by constitutional means alone could properly be excluded from discussion in the talks process;
- the commitment to return as much responsibility as possible to local politicians should be seen within a wider framework of stable relationships to be worked out with all concerned;
- new political arrangements would be designed to ensure that no legitimate group was excluded from eligibility to share in the exercise of this responsibility;
- in the event of a genuine and established ending of violence, the whole range of responses to it would inevitably be looked at afresh.

6. The British Government has no desire to inhibit or impede legitimate constitutional expression of any political opinion, or any such input to the political process, and wants to see included in this process all main parties which have sufficiently shown they genuinely do not espouse violence. It has no blueprint. It wants an agreed accommodation, not an imposed settlement, arrived at through an inclusive process in which the parties are free agents.

7. The British Government does not have, and will not adopt, any prior objective of "ending of partition". The British Government cannot enter a talks process, or expect others to do so, with the purpose of achieving a predetermined outcome, whether the "ending of partition" or anything else. It has accepted that the eventual outcome of such a process could be a united Ireland, but this can only be on the basis of the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. Should this be the eventual outcome of a peaceful democratic process, the British Government would bring forward legislation to implement the will of the people here. But unless

the people of Northern Ireland come to express such a view, the British Government will continue to uphold the union, seeking to ensure the good governance of Northern Ireland, in the interests of all its people, within the totality of relationships in these islands.

8. Evidence on the ground that any group had ceased violent activity would induce resulting reduction of security force activity. Were violence to end, the British Government's overall response in terms of security force activity on the ground would still have to take account of the overall threat. The threat posed by Republican and Loyalist groups which remained active would have to continue to be countered.

9. It is important to establish whether this provides a basis for a way forward. The British Government would answer specific questions or give further explanation.