

IN CONFIDENCE



*Twin  
tracks*

10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

21 March 1996

I much appreciated the way in which you and your party contributed to the recent round of intensive consultations, to help clear the way for all-party negotiations on 10 June with the aim of a widely acceptable and comprehensive political settlement.

In my statement to the House of Commons on 28 February I made clear that we hoped these consultations would lead to widespread agreement on the key issues. However I also said that if this did not prove to be the case, the Government would, after reviewing the outcome of the consultations with the Irish Government, bring forward legislation on the elective process based on a judgement of what seemed most broadly acceptable; and that decisions on the other issues would also be announced as appropriate.

During the consultations we received sharply conflicting representations on the nature of the elective process, on the need for and role of an elected forum, and on the case for holding parallel referenda in both parts of Ireland. It is clear that there is no widespread agreement on these issues. The Government has therefore had to take some difficult decisions.

IN CONFIDENCE

## IN CONFIDENCE

- 2 -

As you know, I shall be making a further Statement in the House of Commons later today which will set out these decisions. They will also be reflected in a separate published paper. Other issues such as the groundrules for negotiation and a number of detailed consequential points still need to be settled before too long. The consultation paper given to you on 15 March provides a basis for this, and further meetings to consider the issues will be arranged soon.

I know that my Statement and the accompanying paper will not please everyone. It does, however, represent the Government's best judgement about what is fair and reasonable and what is necessary to bring all the relevant parties into negotiations. We have sought to incorporate constructive features of each party's proposals. Our decisions need to be viewed together and seen as part of a package which will include the proposed groundrules for all party negotiations, when the latter have been finalised.

My Statement and the accompanying paper will set out our decisions in detail but I wanted to let you have a summary in advance. In brief:

- elections will be held on a party list basis to select five representatives in each of the eighteen parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland. In addition, the ten parties which secure the highest number of votes across Northern Ireland as a whole will each get two additional representatives, taken from lists published by the parties in advance;
- these representatives will be members of a 110-strong elected forum in Northern Ireland with characteristics on the lines of Option C in the relevant consultation paper of 8 March;

IN CONFIDENCE

**IN CONFIDENCE**

- 3 -

- the parties which achieve representation will be invited to select negotiating teams from those elected to participate in the negotiations starting on 10 June, subject to the qualification that Sinn Fein will only be invited to do so if there has been an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. The participation of Loyalist parties will also depend on the maintenance of the CLMC ceasefire;
  
- the Government remains to be convinced of the value of holding parallel referendums in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic but has not ruled this out. Meanwhile, it stands by its commitment to put any agreed outcome from the negotiations to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum.

I appreciate that these decisions may not be in line with your preferred options. I trust you will nevertheless consider them carefully and respond positively. I do not believe there is anything here which is in conflict with a fundamental principle of any of the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland. I am also convinced that these decisions provide a way forward which all can reasonably and honourably follow and which can help lead to the comprehensive settlement which the people of Northern Ireland want.

I would be grateful if the substance of this letter could be regarded as confidential until the Parliamentary Statement is made.

*Your sincerely,  
John H.*

Dr John Alderdice

**IN CONFIDENCE**

25 March 1996,

Rt Hon John Major MP,  
Prime Minister,  
10 Downing Street,  
LONDON SW1A 2AA.

Thank you very much for your letter of 21st inst. I am grateful for you letting me know the picture in advance. It makes thoughtful, constructive comment much easier.

I do appreciate the difficulty which the Government has had in this matter, given that the positions of the parties were so far apart. I hope that this is not an omen for the situation we will find when June 10th comes around.

While the Government's decisions are at some distance from our own proposals, we will do our best to make them work. I am rather afraid that the warnings which we gave about adopting such a novel system, are still entirely relevant, but we have already turned our minds to how the difficulties of the new system can best be overcome, and I have written to Sir Patrick, and subsequently to Michael Ancram on a number of the consequential issues.

I believe that there is a good chance that all the parties will stand for the elections, and I am doing my best to emphasize the close comparison between the proposed Forum, with the other Forum, in which we played a role, in Dublin. This perhaps gives some chance that the SDLP will participate. At this point it is not more than 'a reasonable chance', however we will continue to do our best on this, and on other issues.

Dr John Alderdice  
PARTY LEADER