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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE  
11 MILLBANK  
LONDON  
SW1P 4QE

SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR  
NORTHERN IRELAND

The Lord Alderdice FRC Psych  
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland  
88 University Street  
BELFAST  
BT7 1HE

16 March 1998

Dear John,

Last year the Home Secretary wrote to leaders of those political parties from Great Britain represented in the House of Commons about the problem of misleading candidate descriptions on nomination and ballot papers.

Before this practice distorts the democratic process the Government wishes to try to eliminate it. We are, therefore, concerned to prevent candidates using descriptions designed to deceive voters into believing that the candidate is the official representative of an established political party in order to attract votes rightfully intended for that established party.

Following the 1994 European elections, the previous government initiated talks with all the political parties to see whether a solution could be found. A number of solutions were canvassed but, for a number of reasons, no real progress had been made by the time of the general election.

We have now had a further look at this and have concluded that the only workable solution lies in a system of registration of political parties. This would allow us to provide that once a party had registered under a particular name no one except an accredited representative of that party would be able to use its name on nomination



and ballot papers, or anything so similar to it as to be liable to cause confusion in the minds of the electorate. The system would also cover party logos.

The Home Secretary thinks that this would be a sensible and straightforward way of tackling the problem. It would also provide a simple means of identifying political parties for the purposes of elections held under systems other than first-past-the-post, such as the Additional Member System intended for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.

Initially our intention was to combine legislation controlling party funding with the registration of political parties. However, on 28 January the Home Secretary announced that the party funding aspect of the proposed legislation would be deferred until after Lord Neill's Committee has reported on its enquiry into the funding of political parties.

The Government is, however, proceeding with a Registration of Political Parties Bill and I enclose a paper which the Home Secretary has also sent to the Conservatives, Liberal Democrat, Scottish Nationalist and Plaid Cymru parties. You will be aware from the European Parliamentary Elections Bill currently going through Parliament that the 1999 European elections in Northern Ireland will, as usual, use PR(STV) as its method of voting.

The Government feels that registration should be United Kingdom wide. However, I can assure you that there will be no proposed changes to Northern Ireland's current methods of voting at any elections held there without full and proper consultation with the Northern Ireland political parties.

*Marjorie Mowlam*  
**MARJORIE MOWLAM**