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London SW1A 2AH

31 January 1992

Dear Stephen, ^{to NY by Post.}

Visit to UK by Irish President: 31 January - 1 February

President Mary Robinson of Ireland and her husband, Mr Nick Robinson, will be present at the England v Ireland rugby international at Twickenham on 1 February. The President has been a keen supporter of the Irish team since her election in December 1990, although we believe this is the first time she has followed them away from Dublin.

The Prime Minister met President Robinson at the EBRD inauguration in April 1991. She has since visited Britain twice: to receive an honorary degree at Cambridge and be admitted to the Inns of Court; and to receive an honorary degree at Liverpool. Both visits gave her opportunities to see local Irish communities. She has also been to Northern Ireland to attend the enthronement of the new Catholic Archbishop, Cardinal Daly.

The President is to visit Belfast on 4 February at the invitation of women's groups and cultural organisations. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be giving a reception in her honour at Stormont Castle. The visit will be less controversial than it might have been because of the wide admiration for Mrs Robinson in both communities in the Province, (the Unionists know that she opposed the Anglo-Irish Agreement because they were not consulted about it); and because of her often stated wish to offer the hand of friendship to the North.

President Robinson has also made (among other foreign visits) a very successful tour of the United States in late 1991.

All of this is in marked contrast to her predecessors. The last President of Ireland never visited Britain in fourteen years. No previous President has visited Northern Ireland. The change is a tribute to the President's personal determination to break down barriers, despite the reluctance of the Irish Government to give their agreement to such visits. The President probably hopes that her relations will be easier with a new Taoiseach.

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The President is not directly affected by the contest to succeed Mr Haughey. The Fianna Fail party will make its own decision. Mr Haughey will retire formally on 10 February. A successor may be chosen by his party on 6 February. The new Taoiseach's appointment will be confirmed by the Dail on 11 February.

Yours ever,
Christopher Prentice.

(C N R Prentice)
Private Secretary

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