



Dublin stands by Hume

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Peace plan still alive, despite Major rejection

By EMILY O'REILLY Political Correspondent

BRITISH Prime Minister John Major officially killed off the Hume-Adams initiative in the Commons yesterday. It was not the way to advance the peace process, he said — and he claimed that Taoiseach Albert Reynolds agreed with him.

But sources in Dublin say that the Government has indicated privately to SDLP leader John Hume that his joint peace initiative with Gerry Adams has not been sidelined in the latest move by the two Governments for a joint peace process.

The Irish Press has learned that tomorrow's meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference in Belfast will start discussing the specifics of how to encourage Sinn Féin to come to the talks table by considering what could be on offer to the party in the event of an IRA ceasefire.

The Government's private assurances to John Hume contrasts sharply with yesterday's House of Commons claim from John Major that both he and the Taoiseach had decided to ignore the initiative and press on with their efforts to restart the aborted three-strand talks process, involving only the constitutional parties in the North and the two Governments.

However, sources close to the talks have told the Irish Press that the "label" Hume/Adams had to be removed because of Unionist objections to discussing a plan originating directly from the Sinn Féin president. The sources also claimed that Sinn Féin knew and understood this.

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Sources have also indicated that elements of Hume/Adams are still contained in the Tanaiste's six-point peace plan outlined last week in the Dáil. They pointed to recent comments by the Taoiseach that elements of Hume/Adams, properly developed, could contribute to a broader peace process.

And in a statement yesterday, Mr Adams described the British government's rejection of the initiative as "inexcusably negative and dismissive". He blamed the Major government's dependence on Unionist votes in the Commons as the reason for the attitude adopted.

But official sources close to the talks said last night that tomorrow's Anglo-Irish conference meeting would now concentrate on how the "call for a cessation of violence from the two Governments "can be carried forward", and they indicated that the specifics of what would be on offer to Sinn Féin would be discussed, since the guarantees by both Governments to the Unionists were "more than adequate."