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NOTE RE: ATTENDANCE AT THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECEPTION ON 10 DECEMBER 2001

I went to the Secretary of State's Human Rights reception on 10 December arriving at about 7.40 pm and I spoke to many people including the Secretary of State who greeted me very warmly, and Mr Michael Gallagher and Mr Stanley McCombe both of whom were bereaved in the Omagh Bomb. I had not expected to see them there and was very surprised when Mr Gallagher spoke to me. He was very warm in his support and he spent some time articulating to Dermot Nesbitt who joined us the fact that the families did not want to be used as a political football again and that the Ulster Unionists should not come out just to attack my report because of what it contained but that they should look at what it contained and see what needed to be done. He said that if the Unionists came out on one side then the Nationalists would come out on the other and the whole thing would become lost in the interchange. He said that he wanted Dermot Nesbitt to pass this back to Mr Trimble. Mr Gallagher and Mr McCombe both expressed to me their appreciation of what we have done and told me a little about the difficulties that the families have experienced.

At that point Paul Priestly appeared. I had said to the Secretary of State in the course of our earlier conversation that I saw the way forward as being for those responsible to accept that there is a problem in the management and dissemination of intelligence from Special Branch to the rest of the Force and there is a problem in the Omagh Bomb Investigation and to see that both issues are dealt with immediately. Paul said that the Secretary of State had thought about this, the Chief Constable was upstairs and he asked me if I would go and speak to the Chief Constable. I asked was the Chief on his own, I was told he was, I then went upstairs to speak to the Chief Constable. The Chief Constable said to me that he was concerned that there were a number of significant deficiencies in our report. He said for example to me:

1. The role of the ACC Crime and the responsibilities of the different officers is not described in our report as a significant deficiency.

2. [redacted]

3. He talked about Martin Bridger and the HOLMES account. He said that Martin had no experience of a HOLMES account, that he had asked to bring in experts into the HOLMES computer for the Omagh Investigation. He said he had agreed to this and Martin had brought the people up. He had then asked the question, when he got the answer to the question, he didn't need his experts. He said that this indicated that Martin didn't know how the HOLMES system works and that he had not run a serious investigation. I asked the Chief Constable did he know how to run a HOLMES investigation and he said he is HOLMES trained. I then asked him did he know how to interrogate a HOLMES computer, he hesitated and then he said no. I said that this was the position with Martin Bridger, it didn't mean that he wasn't an experienced investigator.

4. [redacted]

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5. The Chief Constable told me that McArthur the Senior Investigating Officer has had access to all Special Branch material. I asked when and he told me that it was last week. He told me that Mr McArthur had found no relevant intelligence there which would assist his investigation.

6. He said to me that he would have got his judicial review, that his legal advice was that I was being unreasonable. I made no comment.

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8. He told me that he was on the edge of a breakthrough in the Omagh Investigation.

9. He told me that I would never be able to mend a bridge with the police that I had destroyed my relationship with them.

10. He told me he was intending to bring in an outside Investigator and I pointed out that this was my first recommendation.

11. He talked to me about withholding access to Prism He said that we had made very serious allegations that the RUC would not give us information. This was totally untrue. He said Martin Bridger was told there were two systems at the beginning and he also said to me that on the matter of Develop Vetting he had spoken to Dave Vaness who had told him that he wouldn't let those individuals within a mile of his Special Branch.