



Northern  
Ireland  
Office

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## NI Secretary-Micheál Martin - intro call

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17 April 2020 at 16:27

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### READOUT | CALL BETWEEN SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND AND TÁNAISTE - 17 APRIL

#### Present:

Secretary of State (SoS)

Tánaiste

Madeleine Alessandri, Irish Government

Oliver Legard, Special Adviser to Secretary of State

Ciarán Hayes, UK Government

Barbara Cullinane, Irish Government

Chris Donoghue, Special Adviser to Tánaiste

Laurence Simms, Irish Government

- **Tánaiste** updated on the current situation in the Republic of Ireland.
- **SoS** updated on discussions he had with CEOs in the UK recently and said there was a desire was to begin to get business moving again as soon as practicable. He said at the moment that the public were with both governments on the lockdown measures and the polling reflected this. He asked about the anticipated peak in Ireland.
- **Tánaiste** said that Ireland is now looking towards a plateau of cases and more or less, in the last 10 days, there has been stability in the numbers going in and coming out of ICU. He said that the difficult political management is now in nursing homes, particularly in the last 48 hours. He spoke of the difficulties of keeping people apart in certain private nursing homes, but fundamentally whether it was public/private homes did not matter, the main concern for the government was saving lives.
- **SoS** said that the care homes issue was one replicated in England. He said that the media in the UK had been reporting heavily the issues about nursing homes in the last few days. He said that UKG was currently determined not to have public discussions on exit strategy at the minute. The UK Government focus was on keeping the "stay at home" message simple at the minute. He said that COBR agreed to review things at the end of the month and he outlined the 5 tests that the FSS set out yesterday. He said that a Quad meeting with FM and dFM in 10 days time would be useful ahead of those review points.
- **SoS** then outlined the current situation with E/W connectivity and P&O ferries with the compounding of ships at Peel Ports. SoS said a lot of work was going on between UKG departments and the Northern Ireland Executive to resolve the connectivity issue, with the main focus being protecting connectivity rather than saving certain companies.
- **Tánaiste** said that for Ireland protecting the supply lines is key and they are open to support. He said that the Irish Government were now looking ahead toward the step-by-step easing of restrictions, though he anticipated that there were likely to be significant restrictions in Ireland throughout the summer. He said that on 5 May, when the current measures elapse, there is a public and media expectation that there will be some change and an exit strategy.
- He added that the Taoiseach had promised to publish an exit strategy by the end of the month. He said it would be similar to the tests that the Secretary of State outlined and based on medical advice. He said the Irish Government was conscious that keeping people locked in their homes also causes health problems. He asked

the Secretary of State for UK Government engagement on working up their strategy in concert with NI. He pointed out that avoiding the tension in the schools and testing situations was advantageous. He therefore wanted to move away from "Green vs Orange" and ask the Ireland and NI CMOs to look at an all-island approach. He said that this would require Ireland's CMO being given some flexibility to look at an all-island approach and the UK Government giving the NI Executive and their CMO flexibility to look at an all-island approach, whilst recognising the two jurisdictions. He cautioned that not doing so would allow Sinn Féin to turn this debate to a Nationalist/Unionist one.

- **SoS** agreed on having the up front conversations and said the earlier bringing these issues up the better, so that they could work together on communications. He said from a political point of view, he was happy to continue to give support to the CMOs to work together and that it would be vital for officials in NIO and DfAT to work together very closely. He suggested that officials in Dublin and London look to build on existing work to tackle the issue of a coordinated exit strategy.
- **Tánaiste** said that the Ireland health team was growing increasingly concerned that moving forward there may be differences between two jurisdictions. He pointed to the increase in testing nursing/care home setting, so that Ireland can identify clusters and stop the spread, with the easing of restrictions over the time. He said that the UK approach was different, and therefore that may end up with the UK having more immunity. He said it was easier to limit movement E/W but not N/S. He said Ireland's CMO was incredibly concerned about the two different strategies if NI is on a different path, and that is why he wanted to be helpful and look at how they could design a "two jurisdictions, one island" exit strategy.
- **SoS** said that he suspected the UK Government will need to manage this across the devolved administrations, with all of them taking slightly different approaches. He finally turned back to the Tánaiste's offer of looking at supporting E/W connectivity.
- **Tánaiste** said that it would be helpful to speak with the ferry operators as he was also aware that they need to keep ferries running after the crisis. He said that the Irish Government had shown willingness to put in support mechanisms and having a communication channel open with the UK Government was important. He added he thought it would be a good signal of joint working between governments if they could arrange a joint measure.
- **SoS** agreed and reiterated his desire to get another Quad meeting w/c 27 April and ensure that UK Government and Irish Government officials remain in contact on the issues raised.
- **Tánaiste** agreed.

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