



Northern
Ireland
Office

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NI Secretary-Micheál Martin - intro call

SOS Lewis <sos.lewis@nio.gov.uk>

17 April 2020 at 10:57

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Thanks for the prep all, see readout below. A positive first call, which SoS was happy with. No specific actions arising, but they have now exchanged phone numbers.

Coveney-SOS call is in for 2.45-3 today.

NR

READOUT | CALL BETWEEN SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND AND MICHEÁL MARTIN - 17 APRIL

Attendees:

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (SOS)

Micheál Martin (MM)

Oliver Legard, NIO SpAd

Ciarán Hayes, NIO PPS

SOS thanked MM for taking time out of what he was sure was a very busy period. He opened by saying that good progress seemed to have been made on the Irish Government formation. He said that the UK and Irish Government working together had been particularly key during the COVID-19 outbreak and that he wanted to continue to work positively with the Irish Government, particularly on keeping each other updated on approaches.

MM welcomed the call. He said that public health cooperation was key in tackling the public health risks posed by COVID-19, and ensuring that channels, such as the NI-Ireland CMOs, were open was crucial. He said that the COVID-19 figures in the North in terms of total deaths suggested the North had done well to manage the outbreak so far, which he was happy to see.

SOS said that compliance with the distancing measures in NI had been good and demonstrated a real unity of purpose across the communities of NI. He said that his view has always been there may be slight differences in approach between UK and Ireland - but the messaging around that is something that they could work together to handle. He said that it was inevitable that different jurisdictions may take different approaches at different stages, but reiterated that when that happens, working together to manage the communications was the best approach.

MM agreed and said that he was very keen on depoliticising the COVID-19 situation as much as possible. He outlined that he would continue to push the need to take a medically-led approach. He spoke of his party's good relations with SDLP, who he felt were taking a similar approach.

SOS strongly agreed on the depoliticisation. He said that although some disagreement on the details had emerged at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak between the NI parties in the Executive, most recently they have been working together and all have been focused on the public health response to the crisis.

MM thanked the Secretary of State for the initiative of getting in touch.

SOS promised to send over his personal number and said that MM was welcome to get in contact at any time, and he looked forward to a more formal meeting in the near future.

[Quoted text hidden]