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NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

29 December 1997

PRISONS

**STATEMENT BY MR ADAM INGRAM MP, MINISTER OF STATE
RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURITY AND PRISONS:**

The Secretary of State and I met senior officials of the Prison Service this morning about the measures to be taken following the murder of Billy Wright in HMP Maze on Saturday 27 December. The Chief Constable was also in attendance. This afternoon I visited the Maze Prison to be briefed at first hand about the events over the weekend and what immediate steps the Governor intends to take to improve security at the prison.

As a first step INLA prisoners have been transferred to facilitate detailed forensic examination of the scene of the murder. They are locked down in accordance with prison regulations and are being interviewed by the RUC in connection with the incident.

In addition, the Governor has brought forward a programme of regular block searches which was due to begin in the New Year. This is one of a number of changes which the new management team under Mr Mogg are in the process of introducing.

This team has only been in place for a few weeks and has my full support in its difficult and challenging task.

The Secretary of State and I have also decided to extend the remit of the existing independent enquiry which is reviewing procedures at the Maze following the escape of Liam Averill to include this incident.

We expect to have its report on both incidents very shortly.

Further to this and in view of the wide-spread public concern, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, General Sir David Ramsbotham GCB CBE, has been asked to undertake a full inspection of the prison.

This will be a detailed inspection covering all areas.

In the 8 months since this Government has had responsibility for prisons in Northern Ireland there have been a number of serious incidents in the prisons here.

The Secretary of State and I have not taken these lightly.

On the contrary; the fact that there is a new management team at the Maze demonstrates our resolve.

And the recommendations of the inquiry following the discovery of a tunnel in March, before we took office, have been followed up and are being implemented.

We will be equally vigorous in pursuing the recommendations of the current inquiry. The fact that we have also decided to involve Sir David Ramsbotham in conducting a full examination of the prison also demonstrates our determination that all reasonable measures are taken.

There can never be any guarantee of complete security in a prison and especially a prison of this nature.

However I hope I have said enough to indicate my determination to do everything possible to prevent a repetition of such events.