



Clare Checksfield
Northern Ireland Office

Dear Clare,

BRIEFING FOR NORTHERN IRELAND MINISTERS ON PRISON ISSUES

Thank you for your letter of 31 May in which you invited my views on the possibilities for ensuring that Northern Ireland Ministers are sufficiently briefed on prison issues in advance of future IGC meetings. I appreciate your concerns and I am sure that satisfactory arrangements can be put in place.

Before explaining how best we can do this, I should make a couple of general points. First, it is worth noting that the points you raise, along with those in John Fisher's note to you of 11 June - to which I shall respond separately - are precisely the points raised, almost routinely, by Philip McDonagh with Phil Wheatley, the Director of Dispersal Prisons. Phil Wheatley has been communicating directly with Philip McDonagh for some time now, both in person and on paper. He is happy to continue to do so. You, and copy recipients, will wish to know that this separate line of communication between the Irish Government and the Prison Service exists and that, to my mind, it works well.

Secondly, the very fact that the same questions continue to arise is itself symptomatic of the difficulties we face. The simple fact is that the Irish do not like some of the answers they receive. For example, we can continue to explain the reasons for the heightened security measures for all prisoners in SSUs - not least amongst which is the PIRA attempted escape from Whitemoor - but I suspect that the only response likely to satisfy the Irish would be the removal of these measures altogether.

Thirdly, while I accept your arguments that Northern Ireland Ministers should be able to make some comment on issues that are the responsibility of the Home Secretary, this may not be right in all instances. We will need to be careful that we do not create an expectation that your Ministers will comment, for example, on the treatment of life sentences prisoners in England and Wales. More generally, where the policies of our respective Secretaries of State differ slightly, Northern Ireland Ministers might not wish to act as apologists for the Home Office.

This said, I am sure we can help you provide up to date briefing for your Ministers. On your first point, I will be in touch shortly with a standard line on the treatment of republican terrorist prisoners in England and Wales. On the second, may I suggest that, as before, you use the Terrorism and Protection unit as your point of contact. Once told of an impending IGC meeting, we will be able to contact those responsible in different parts of the Prison Service, and in the Home Office as necessary, and we will provide you with a consolidated view of the current issues. We should be able to do this very swiftly, though obviously the more notice we have the better.

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Terrorism and Protection Unit
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Facsimile: 0171-273 2773
13 June 1996

1. Mr Bell
Mr Stephens
Mr Adams
Mr Fisher

A sensible
outcome - IPL

will trigger
the
Home Office
for briefing
prior
to IGCs.

2. Mrs
14/6

18/6
o/r

PA
IGC file

CONFIDENTIAL

This is not a foolproof system, but it is simple and it should cover the main issues. I am afraid that, since it is not unknown for terrorist prisoners to complain to Sinn Fein and the Irish Government before contacting local prison management, we will never be sure that we have anticipated all that the Irish might raise at a particular meeting.

I hope this system works well. I shall leave it to my successor, Chris Jones, to coordinate for the Home Office on his arrival in the middle of July.

John Wane, Brian White

A copy of this note goes to recipients of yours, to Phil Wheatley in the Prison Service, to Donald Lamont in the FCO and to others within the TPU here.

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Hugh

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Mr. White
Mr. White
Mr. White
Dublin

all under control 3/7/6

The following information was received from recent correspondence (Mr. Lough's note of 21 May) that the Irish raised a number of questions relating to Irish prisoners in HM Prison White moor. At a recent Delegation Meeting, the Irish delegation, however, was indicating that the Security of Prisoners was not one of their queries.

The following information follows:-

White moor escapes: The Irish were concerned about the trial of 5 republican prisoners who had escaped from White moor prison. They understand that the prison authorities have taken steps to prevent further escapes and have asked that where possible the prisoners should be kept in the prison.

Prisoners in HM Prison White moor: The Irish delegation have indicated that they are concerned about the treatment of prisoners in HM Prison White moor because of reports of ill-treatment. They are also concerned about the conditions of the prisoners. The following information follows:-