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Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast BT4 3ST

Edward Oakden Esq
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
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7 August 1996

Dear Edward,

APPRENTICE BOYS PARADE: 10 AUGUST

Following the breakdown last night of negotiations between the Apprentice Boys and the Bogside Residents Group (BRG), my Secretary of State will today sign an order banning all public processions and open air meetings from the western section of Londonderry City walls, which overlook the Nationalist Bogside area. A copy of the order is at Annex A.

The order comes into effect at 1800 tonight and will last until the end of August. The security force operation to secure the relevant section of the walls will also begin at 1800 this evening, simultaneously with the announcement of the decision. The information is being held on a strict need-to-know basis until then. The timing has been dictated by security force concerns that protesters might otherwise act pre-emptively to occupy the walls; a public rally called by the BRG tomorrow evening, and an anti-internment rally scheduled for Friday night, offer opportunities for such action.

This decision has been taken in the light of the Chief Constable's advice that to leave the walls open in their entirety would place serious strains, constituting undue demands, on police and military resources on 10 August and

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in the period before and after. The Secretary of State's statutory powers under Article 5 of the Public Order (NI) Order go wider for this purpose than the Chief Constable's, in that it enables him to take account of undue demands on police and military forces, and to ban any parade in a given location for up to three months. On the basis of the information with which the Chief Constable has furnished him, the Secretary of State has concluded that it is appropriate for him to exercise his power in the particular circumstances obtaining in Londonderry. The press release announcing the decision and the supporting Q&A (Annexes B and C) make clear that this decision has been taken to meet a specific RUC operational requirement.

As the announcement will make clear, the order can be rescinded if a local accommodation is reached before Friday. That seems unlikely. The rejection by the BRG of compromise proposals put forward by John Hume yesterday, and which the Apprentice Boys had accepted, suggests that the Sinn Fein leadership are not interested in reaching agreement, and may instead try to use the situation to orchestrate confrontation with marchers and police. However, the closure of the most contentious section of the walls, and the fact that the Apprentice Boys negotiated in good faith with the BRG, go a considerable way to meeting wider Nationalist concerns about the parade and will reduce (though not remove) the scope for Sinn Fein mischief-making.

Unionist reaction to the announcement is likely to be critical, despite the fact that the decision is based on RUC operational advice: it should nevertheless be containable. The indications are that the Apprentice Boys will decline to

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parade on the part of the walls that remain open, and will instead mount a peaceful protest at their headquarters in the City. Discussions in Londonderry involving church leaders and others continue, but there are at present no plans for march organisers and residents to meet again.

My Secretary of State believes that this limited ban is, under the circumstances, a proportionate and prudent measure. Nevertheless, while it lessens the probability of serious disorder in Londonderry this weekend it remains a real possibility, and the security force planning to cope with that eventuality continues.

A handling plan in support of the announcement has been prepared. The Secretary of State will brief political and church leaders at the time of the announcement including John Taylor (in David Trimble's absence), Ian Paisley and John Hume. Officials will brief the loyalist parties and key opinion formers. The Irish will also be informed. Briefing material is being circulated to interested Departments this afternoon, and to overseas posts: the Washington Embassy will update the US Administration and George Mitchell. The RUC will lead in handling the media on the ground, though the Secretary of State will be available to respond to interview bids later this evening.

I am copying this letter to the Private Offices of the members of NI Committee and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and Sir Robin Butler.

Yours sincerely

(SIGNED)

ROBERT CRAWFORD

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