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From the Private Secretary

21 February 1997

Dee David,

ROISIN MCALISKEY

The Prime Minister has been following the press coverage of Ms. McAliskey's case, and the increasing concern being shown in the Irish Republic. He has no wish to see her treated differently from other prisoners just because of a public campaign, and fully respects the independence of the Prison Service. Equally, he is keen that we should not unnecessarily give the republican movement a cause which will attract wider support, especially at a time when the IRA and Sinn Fein are on the back foot in PR terms.

I understand that several of the claims made about Ms. McAliskey's treatment are demonstrably untrue, for example that she will be shackled while giving birth. The note of 14 February from the Director General of the Prison Service nevertheless suggests that, not least because Holloway is not well equipped to deal with Category A prisoners, there are aspects of her treatment and condition which could easily be exploited by the ill-intentioned. I understand that there was a useful meeting between officials of interested departments this afternoon, and that the difficulties were fully explored.

The Prime Minister has two points:

- (a) we need to work harder to get across to the media here, in the Irish Republic and the US, the facts of the case. More proactive efforts than press releases and the availability of background material may be needed;
- (ii) in taking decisions about Mrs. McAliskey's treatment, those concerned need to keep a very careful eye on the balance between real security needs and the wider aspects of this issue.

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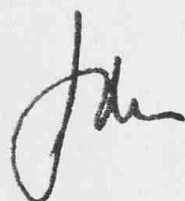
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I would be grateful if you could keep me in close touch with developments.

I am copying this letter to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Ken Lindsay (Northern Ireland Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Yours ever



JOHN HOLMES

David Redhouse, Esq.,
Home Office.

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