



cc/EO
Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast BT4 3ST

The Rt Hon Michael Howard QC MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
50 Queen Anne's Gate
LONDON
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NBP
File
4 January 1997 7/1

Dear Michael:

Thank you for your letter of 16 December about the temporary release of conditionally transferred prisoners. Naturally I am disappointed that you have been unable to accept the compromise that I offered in respect of such prisoners.

I do understand your concern that prisoners should not gain substantial benefit solely by virtue of being transferred to Northern Ireland. However, we do accept that prison regimes in the three UK jurisdictions are not identical and I think that an exception can be made in relation to compassionate release that will not set precedents elsewhere. I remain of the view that questions of compassionate release (and related questions of security and escorting) are best determined by the authorities of the jurisdiction in which the prisoner is held.

I note that our officials are in contact about ways to speed up the handling of cases. However, it remains to be seen whether, and to what extent, systems can be streamlined. I am conscious that decisions about compassionate release often need to be taken within hours rather than days.

LMCR/SOFS/29800



As you are content for us to meet to resolve this issue, I will ask my office to make contact with yours with a view to arranging a convenient date and time.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Michael Forsyth, Sir Robin Butler and to other members of the Northern Ireland Committee.

James F. ...

Palmer