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cc: PB



QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

01 APR 1997

The Rt Hon Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP
 Northern Ireland Office
 Stormont Castle
 Belfast
 BT4 3ST

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Dear Secretary of State

ROISIN McALISKEY

1. I am most grateful for your letter of 10 March in which you laid out the sensitivities that exist within Northern Ireland about the management of the case of Roisin McAliskey.
2. My officials have been working with yours and those in the Foreign Office to ensure that proactive briefing is widely available and has a consistent message. I believe that this is beginning to have a positive effect in the way the story is being portrayed both here and in the Irish press.
3. The muted domestic media response to the failure of her application for bail at the High Court on 14 March may be an indication that the previous level of concern at her treatment has now abated. The judge who had earlier expressed concern about her conditions now appears satisfied by them.
4. There have, as you know, been significant developments during the past two weeks. Ms McAliskey has now been informed that she may keep her baby with her in the mother and baby unit at Holloway prison after the baby is born. We have also been able to relax some of the security measures that she was subject to. She is now able to attend ante-natal classes and go to the swimming pool and gymnasium with other expectant mothers. The high level of strip searching had previously been reduced and to this has now been added a reduction in the number of nightly checks.
5. In regard to the arrangements for the birth, we are now laying some emphasis on the fact that she will not be subjected to any form of physical restraint, from the moment she leaves Holloway to have her baby, through her confinement and up to the point when she returns again to the prison.

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I know that timing of these changes caused concern because they appeared so long in coming. However it is important that in so far as possible Ms McAliskey should not be treated differently to other prisoners. In particular, the decision as to whether she kept her baby required her to undergo the normal application and admission procedure for the mother and baby unit.

But I can assure you that Ms McAliskey is receiving the very highest level of medical care and her pregnancy is otherwise proceeding normally.

- It is of course likely that Ms McAliskey and her family will try to maintain a high profile for her case if they can. The recent announcement of her intention to stand as a candidate in the General Election and her subsequent withdrawal have clearly demonstrated this. The case will therefore continue to require sensitive handling and management and our officials will need to maintain their co-operation and co-ordination.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and to Sir Robin Butler.

Yours sincerely

David Redburn

MICHAEL HOWARD

(approved by the Home Secretary
and signed in his absence)

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