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18/8

FAX

UK Govt press copy to →

*E: JEH or
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To: *PHILIP BARTON*

From: KATHARINE BRAMWELL

Date: *18/8/97*

Time:

Recipient's Fax Number: *8399044*

Number of pages (including this one): *4*

Short Message

State name for use 'if asked' attached.

Katharine

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PLEASE TELEPHONE: 0171 273 4602

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CONFIDENTIAL

From: Bob Thomas
Prison Service
Communications
Room 302b
Cleland House

0171 217 6633

18 August 1997

cc Home Secretary
Joyce Quin
George Howarth
Sir Richard Wilson
John Warne
Mike Granatt
Phil Wheatley
Nigel Newcomen
Linda Robinson
Norman Warner
Ed Owen
Press Office
10 Downing St
Press Office - NIO

1. Audrey Nelson
2. Richard Tilt

**REDUCTION IN RISK CATEGORY OF PROVISIONAL IRA PRISONERS IN SSUs:
RESPONDING TO PRESS ENQUIRIES.**

It is probable that once the moves associated with this downgrading exercise get underway, news of the change in security classification will begin to filter out via the prisoners concerned.

The attached press statement, agreed with Richard Tilt and Phil Wheatley, has been prepared for use on an 'if asked' basis once the moves have been completed. (Probably late this afternoon)

Press Officers have been told not to discuss anything about the recategorisation on security grounds until receipt of confirmation that the transfers have been completed.

Once we have that confirmation, it is our intention to do no more than respond to enquiries with this statement on behalf of the Prison Service and draw from the Q&A attached to Kate Collins submission of 12 August as necessary.



Bob Thomas



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PRESS STATEMENT

18 August 1997

SECURITY RECLASSIFICATION OF EXCEPTIONAL RISK PRISONERS

Following a regular security classification review, the Prison Service has today downgraded the security categorisation of 14 prisoners, 13 of whom are convicted of, or charged with, terrorist offences. The 14 are all currently held in Special Secure Units (SSUs).

They will now be transferred from where they have been held, to normal locations in the main parts of the six highest security establishments in the English prison system.

The decision to reclassify their security is entirely operational and was taken by the Prison Service's Director of Dispersals, Phil Wheatley. The move is based on a reduction in security risk, and follows thorough assessment by the Prison Service in consultation with the police.

From today the 14 are downgraded from exceptional risk Category A prisoners to high risk Category A. Nine are sentenced prisoners and five are awaiting trial. The reclassification means:

- they are no longer required to be held in SSUs;
- they are now eligible for closely and separately supervised 'open' visits, enabling a degree of physical contact with the visitor (in SSUs visits are routinely 'closed' with a screen separating the individuals)
- they have access to a greater range of regime activities within prison and wider association with other inmates.

The Prison Service keeps security classifications regularly under review.

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As a result of these changes the SSU at Full Sutton will be mothballed but will be available for immediate use if required. The other SSUs are located at Whitemoor in Cambridgeshire and Belmarsh in London. The other three dispersal prisons are Frankland, near Durham, Long Lartin in Worcestershire, and Wakefield, Yorkshire.