

10. Oct. 1997 17:43

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No. 8735 P. 2/4

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FROM: N P PERRY
SECURITY POLICY AND OPERATIONS DIVISION
9 OCTOBER 1997

F26
16/11**DESK IMMEDIATE**

cc: PS/Mr Murphy (B&L) - e
PS/Mr Ingram (B&L) - e
PS/PUS (B&L) - e
Mr Thomas - e
Mr Leach - e
Mr Stephens - e
Mr Bell - e
Mr Watkins - e
Mr Priestly - e
Mr Brooker - e
Mr Hill - e
Mr Beeton - e
Mr Maccabe - e
Mrs Collins - e
Mr Woods - e
Mr Clarke - e
Mr Warner - e

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - e

SIOBHAN O'HANLON

The Secretary of State asked for details of yesterday's incident when Siobhan O'Hanlon was stopped at a police checkpoint.

2. At 5.10 pm an RUC patrol established a routine VCP on the Monagh Road. At 5.20 pm they stopped a car - the seventh they had checked - which contained Ms O'Hanlon, Paul Hamilton and Eddie Howell. A police officer asked them, in accordance with the EPA, to identify themselves, which they did reluctantly, and where they were coming from and going to (from 'town to home'). The officer then searched the car. O'Hanlon and Hamilton dismounted from the vehicle during the search, O'Hanlon with a folder and Hamilton with a brief case.

HL/22250

10. Oct. 1997 17:43

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722

No. 8735 P. 3/4

Hamilton at this point became abusive. The officer asked to see the papers they were carrying; O'Hanlon initially refused, but opened the folder when the officer cited his powers under s24 of the EPA. On seeing that the documents related to the Talks he returned them unread to Ms O'Hanlon and thanked her. He went through the same procedure with Hamilton. While the search was underway both O'Hanlon and Hamilton made a number of calls on their mobile phones (one being to Mr Murphy's office, as recorded in Mr McCourt's minute of this morning). The car was allowed to proceed at 5.40 pm.

3. The Chief Constable discussed the case briefly with me this morning. He confirmed that both he and ACC Belfast had looked personally at the circumstances of the incident. He was satisfied that the officers concerned had behaved entirely properly. The VCP was a routine operation and Ms O'Hanlon's car had been stopped by chance: the Chief Constable was clear that had the car's occupants been prepared to co-operate they would have been passed through the checkpoint as quickly as the other vehicles. There was no question of the RUC 'targeting' Sinn Fein or any other Talks delegates, though Sinn Fein were clearly trying to exploit the incident: equally, occasional contacts between Sinn Fein members and the security forces carrying out their lawful duties were unavoidable. The RUC would do their best to ensure that friction was kept to a minimum: he hoped Sinn Fein would do the same.

4. There is no indication yet of a formal complaint being made by Ms O'Hanlon or her colleagues. There has been relatively little media coverage of the incident today.

HL/22250

10. Oct. 1997 17:44

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722

No. 8735 P. 4/4

Line to take

5. While the timing of the encounter was unfortunate, given the Talks, it was not pre-planned and the officer directly involved exercised his powers properly; nor did he read any Talks-related documents. If the matter is raised, the Secretary of State may wish to follow the line that this is an operational matter for the Chief Constable; that if any individual has a complaint against the police there are procedures through which this can be pursued; and that there is no question of the RUC 'targeting' Sinn Fein Talks delegates or anyone else.

[Signed: N P Perry]

N P PERRY

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