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QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

25 SEP 1997

The Rt Hon Mo Mowlam MP
Northern Ireland Office
Whitehall
London SW1

Dear Mo,

IRISH PRISONERS

Our officials have been considering how best to announce the coming into force of Schedule 1 to the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 on 1 October, and the associated changes to temporary release arrangements for transferred prisoners which we have agreed should be introduced at the same time.

Given that the changes in temporary release arrangements are likely to attract public attention, and the various sensitivities associated with these changes, the announcement of the new arrangements must be handled with the utmost care.

Having considered various options and taking account of the Prime Minister's view - which I share - that any announcement should be as low key as possible, I propose including a brief reference to the introduction of Schedule 1 as part of the general announcement of the introduction of the Crime (Sentences) Act.

On the return of Parliament I will ensure, by way of a Parliamentary Question, that the new policy is recorded in Hansard.

On the matter of timing, I am minded to announce the changes on 1 October itself so reducing the scope for public speculation prior to the coming into force of the new provisions.

Officials in our jurisdictions will be notifying those prisoners affected of the changes in law and policy.

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I understand that you are broadly content with these proposals but may consider yourself issuing a fuller press statement in Northern Ireland. I should be grateful for a chance to comment on any statement you may consider making. However, my own view from the mainland is that there is nothing to be gained from publicity on these changes. They are linked to the passage of the last Government's Act and we would not be making these changes at this precise moment but for the commencement next week of the 1997 Act.

The Prime Minister has asked to be kept informed of developments on this subject and on timing and I am therefore copying this letter to him as well as to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Yours ever,

Jack

JACK STRAW

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