

LIST SPEAKING NOTE  
OF 12/12/97

Roisin McAliskey,

Everything we hear suggests that Roisin McAliskey's health continues to deteriorate.

There is great public concern about the case both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic.

We understand that the High Court may take a decision next week on whether to direct the Magistrate to hear the case in Roisin's absence. This is very welcome in that, at least, it will take the case out of limbo.

In the meantime, Gareth Peirce has also asked the Home Secretary to use his executive authority to withdraw the extradition warrant. As I said when we met some weeks ago, we would support this strongly on humanitarian grounds. It would also be very helpful to the peace process.

Prisoner Tariffs

We are worried about the delay in setting tariffs for the Balcombe Street Four. We have been receiving strong messages of concern about this from the Sinn Fein Leadership. If the Home Secretary could cut through the red tape and take a decision, it would be very helpful indeed.

Once a decision has been taken, and our new legislation is in place - and it should be next week - we can quickly move ahead with their transfer.

Naturally, we would wish that the tariffs would be set at as reasonable a level as possible. We would be deeply concerned if whole life tariffs were to be set. There is in our view no case for setting a tariff higher than the period recommended by the trial judge (30 years).

Let me say finally that we appreciate the new momentum on transfers. It is extremely helpful.