



SECRETARY OF STATE

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POLICY

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
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5 January 1998

Dear Sir,

REFORM OF FIREARMS LAW IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Defence Secretary has seen Mr Ingram's minute of 16 December, seeking colleagues' agreement to the publication in January of a consultation paper with proposals for reforming the firearms legislation in Northern Ireland. The Defence Secretary has also seen John Holmes' letter of 22 December and shares the Prime Minister's reservations about proceeding too quickly with the planned reforms.

On the substance of the proposals, the Defence Secretary notes, and very much welcomes, the intention to exempt certificated personal protection weapons from the planned prohibition on hand guns. This is clearly essential if members of the Security Forces, and others, who are assessed at being at particular risk of terrorist attack are to retain the necessary level of personal protection. Even then, the proposal to declare an intention of removing the exemption when the threat of terrorism has ended and it is safe to do so, which will inevitably be a controversial judgement, will need very careful handling if it is not to undermine confidence in the Government's commitment to the exemption as long as there remains a need for it.

Subject to those points, the Defence Secretary is content with the proposals.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Private Secretaries of other members of IN, to Ken Thomson (Scottish Office), and to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

(M A VENABLES)  
Private Secretary

Ken Lindsay Esq  
Northern Ireland Office

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