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**DRAFT PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT ON *BLOODY SUNDAY*
BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

Madam Speaker, with permission I would like to make a statement about the events known as Bloody Sunday.

On Sunday 30 January 1972 British soldiers opened fire in the streets of Londonderry. Thirteen civilians were killed and others injured. There have been many other deaths since that day - over 3,000 in all. None of these deaths have been easy to bear - least of all for the bereaved families. The pain and suffering felt by those left behind never goes away. But in the words of one of my favourite writers, Maya Angelou, "History, despite its wrench and pain cannot be unlived: but if faced with courage, need not be lived again".

We must all take our share of responsibility for what has happened in Northern Ireland. In general, British soldiers have been a shield, not a sword, in Northern Ireland. Many have lost their lives protecting both sides of the community from sectarian hatred and violence. But what happened on Bloody Sunday was such an exception to that rule that it has remained a source of distress and bitterness ever since.

I was not in Derry on that Sunday a generation ago. But I do know that circumstances brought people together with fatal consequences. It was wrong that unarmed people were shot and killed. It should not have happened, I wish it had not happened. On behalf of the Government I am sorry that it happened.

When the Widgery Tribunal was established, it was not concerned with apportioning blame, its task was to form an objective view of the events. To my regret the Tribunal did not convince everybody that it had got to the truth, and that all the available evidence was adequately considered.

Last year the Irish Government, the hon Member for Foyle, and representatives of the victims' families put before us a set of serious allegations. Some of them had not been made to the Widgery Tribunal. Over the past few months we have examined all the allegations meticulously, including the suggestion of a possible source of further evidence. I recently instructed a senior independent lawyer to evaluate the latter.

[In the light of this analysis, we shall take whatever action is required consistent with the law, and thereafter we will make a further statement.] OR

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[As a result of this we have drawn the relevant information to the attention of the police and the Director of Public Prosecution for Northern Ireland. A further statement will be made when their consideration is completed.]

In addition, when we are able to do so, we will make the material put before us publicly available, with our response to it.

Nothing will bring those who died back. I don't suppose that anything I say will lessen the loss felt by their families. But I truly believe that the sorrow we share about what happened then can help to build the reconciliation which Northern Ireland needs now. And that in confronting this dark page in our shared history we will be better able to find a lasting peace. In that hope lies justice for all those whose lives have been scarred by the past.

We are all going to have to change, we are all going to have to compromise, and we are all going to have to understand our histories - not forget the past - but not live in it. If we can have the strength together to do that we have a chance to build a better future.

I am copying this letter to Ken Lindsay (Northern Ireland Office) and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin (by fax).

JOHN HOLMES

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