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**From: John Holmes**  
**Date: 18 March 1998**

**PRIME MINISTER**

**THE MAZE PRISON**

I attach a letter from Mo, asking for your agreement to make a Parliamentary Statement next week about the Narey Report, and a copy of the report itself. I do not expect you to read the report, you will be glad to hear, but you may like to glance at chapter 1 (pages 6-11), to give you a flavour of what the Maze is like and the difficulties faced by those running it.

Narey makes a number of practical recommendations, but basically accepts that the prison is unique and that there is not much to be done about it. The report is therefore likely to be seen by Unionists as inadequate and a white-wash.

Mo's letter was also written before the latest murder of a Loyalist prisoner in the Maze. That is bound to increase the criticism of the Narey Report when it comes out. Sir David Ramsbotham has just started his own inspection of the Maze. His report is likely to be published in a few weeks time.

This is all very difficult. There is no doubt that the regime at the Maze is more or less indefensible. But it has grown up over many years, and the trend cannot now be reversed without huge difficulty, and trouble on the streets. This is not the moment to take such a task on. So there is little choice but to follow the honest line Adam Ingram took in responding to a PNQ earlier this week of simply accepting that the Maze poses unique problems, that the regime is unsatisfactory, but that changing it is too difficult.

**CONFIDENTIAL**



CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

Should Mo make a statement to Parliament next week in these circumstances? I am not sure there is much to be gained by this, unless the pressure for her to do so is irresistible. It would be better to wait for the Ramsbotham Report, and for her then to make a statement on both reports. It might be worth having a word with her about this in the morning.



JOHN HOLMES

18 March 1998

Yes *unintentionally*

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