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**Title:** Letter from Garret FitzGerald, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to Merlyn Rees, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, concerning a declaration due to be made by the Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, on the status of Northern Ireland. The letter also makes reference to recent quotes attributed to British officials which have appeared in newspapers.

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11th March, 1974.

Rt. Hon. Merlyn Rees,  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Dear Merlyn,

You will receive with this letter the text of the declaration which the Taoiseach will make in the Dail tomorrow at four o'clock. The key elements of it are as agreed at Hillsboro'. The formula accepted by the Unionists was that the Irish Government accept the de facto position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. We have, however, tried to make this even more acceptable by translating it into English as 'the factual position', and by incorporating this into a solemn re-affirmation by the Taoiseach. I know you will encourage Faulkner to react positively - and no doubt the Alliance also. We are, however, anxious that the text, and even the intention to make this statement tomorrow, does not leak out.

I am looking forward to hearing from you soon on any ideas you may have for further constructive action.

I have to say I was very concerned at the form of the press briefings by your officials after our meeting in London. This problem is one that we have faced before, but I had hoped that we should not have to face it again.

The Belfast Newsletter and Irish News both reported that 'a Whitehall official' (Newsletter) or 'British Government sources' (Irish News) questioned the adequacy of a declaration on status by us unless we made moves to amend the Constitution. Such a briefing must encourage Faulkner and his supporters to reject the declaration they agreed on at Hillsboro' and could scarcely be more damaging. It is also false as no such 'friendly pressure' to quote the Irish News was exerted by you at that meeting.

Press Association quoted Whitehall officials as saying that 'early action was now needed by the Irish Government if the Sunningdale Agreement is to have a worthwhile chance of being implemented', and that 'pressure was put on Dr. FitzGerald to produce some tangible moves from Dublin'. This does not reflect the nature of our discussion.

The Daily Mail and the Belfast Newsletter also reported British officials as making 'no attempt to disguise their gloom about the prospects for the Sunningdale proposals' which is also most unhelpful.

I'm sorry to have to raise this matter.

Yours.

