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Dr Marjorie Mowlam MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

/ August 1995

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Ho'.

Thank you for your letter of 17 July and the enclosed press release.

There are clearly strong feelings in both communities about the issue of marches. The RUC are in the best position to establish and carry through discussions between the different interests and they have a long and creditable record of success in thousands of parades passing off quietly and without serious public disorder over the last 25 years. This year's difficulties, many of which were deliberately provoked to draw the RUC into confrontation, ought to be seen as exceptions rather than the rule.

I do believe that the RUC have not been given enough credit for their patient and impartial negotiations that they have conducted between parade organisers and community representatives in attempts to obtain settlements, especially in the lower Ormeau area of Belfast. It remains my view that, for the future, the issue should remain in the hands of the police with decisions continuing to be made by operational commanders. Any other approach carries the danger of the issue of marches and their possible re-routing becoming even more politicised. The fact that the police have, more recently, been able to engage the assistance of seasoned and trusted mediators in the recent confrontation has added significantly to this overall approach and I have



absolutely no doubt that the path of local, focused, dialogue is the right one, and that the police must be allowed to continue on this basis. In this, they have my full support.

You also referred in your press release to the size of the police establishment. A proper professional assessment of the community's policing needs is in progress. It is tasked with examining future demands and priorities on the basis that the ceasefires continue.

It has long been agreed by the Chief Constable, by the Chairman of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland and by the Government that there will be no change to the establishment of the RUC prior to the report of the professional assessment of policing needs. Recent events show that position to be both a sensible and a necessary precaution to ensure the capability of the RUC to meet public order problems or renewed terrorist violence remains unaltered for the time being.

Many steps have, of course, been taken to meet the circumstances of the ceasefires such as adjustments in RUC activity levels and the nature of police deployment. As the Chief Constable feels further relaxations are operationally justified so they will come into effect.

John Hume
John Hume