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PRESS RELEASE

THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT WAS ISSUED TODAY BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR BRIAN PAULKNER

I want to condemn without reservation the conduct we saw in Dungiven yesterday. It was wholly irresponsible; it tended to bring Northern Ireland into discredit; and, most serious of all, it did precisely what our enemies of the IRA must have hoped for in tying down hundreds of the security forces and bringing people who claim to be loyal into confrontation with them.

There is no excuse for those who brought these men to the assembly point yesterday. The organisers were in no doubt well before the event of the attitude of the security forces and the Government. They also knew that a lawful order prohibiting such a parade was in force.

I made that order not just in the interests of maintaining peace in the Dungiven area but in the interests of the whole of Northern Ireland. Had it been observed and respected as it ought to have been, all these hundreds of police and soldiers could have been diverted to far more pressing and constructive duties.

I totally condemn all those who influenced this crowd to assemble for a parade they knew to be illegal, rather than just to proceed to the Drumhead Service which was of course quite unaffected.

I want to make it clear that we will continue to follow our consistent policy on parades as stated on numerous previous occasions. We want to preserve as far as possible the right of peaceful procession, and in particular to allow the great traditional occasions to proceed with the minimum of interference. But we will also do our duty to preserve the peace under the law, and will continue to expect parade organisers to exercise sensible restraint so as to relieve the security forces of burdens which are quite excessive in view of other demands upon them.

Above all, we believe we have a right at this time to call for responsible leadership from all men of influence. It is only thus that the British way of life, fundamental to which is respect for the law, can be preserved in Northern Ireland.

14 June 1971