

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Title:	Transcribed text of an RTÉ [Raidió Teilifís Éireann] News interview with Dr Arthur Butler, Bishop of Connor, concerning talks with members of the IRA [Irish Republican Army] at Feakle, County Clare on 12 December, 1974, and text of an official Irish Government response to Dr Butler's comments.
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- Interviewer: Church leaders of course have used some very severe language on some of the people who were sitting around the table with you in Clare, murderers and monster has even been used. When you spoke to these people around the table Dr. Butler did you find them to be of that category?
- Dr. Butler: Not at all. I think that we were all most impressed with their attitude, with their fair mindedness. We were so pleased to find that they were talking seriously and deeply and with great conviction and they listened so carefully to what we had to say. No, I don't think, for one moment, we would say that we felt we were talking to just gunmen or thugs, by no means.
- Interviewer: Does that mean that that term won't be used in future.
- Dr. Butler: Not necessarily at all. I think there must be a great difference surely between ~~should be~~ say leaders of a particular movement and some of the methods which are used by members of the organisation. I still would have to say that absolutely appalling murders have been committed and not only on their side, on other sides too. I think you have got to differentiate between people who are thinking hard in terms of policy and those lower down the ranks who are using particularly repulsive methods to try and achieve what they want.
- Interviewer: I think some people would take the view Dr. Butler that it's the leaders who must be held responsible for all the actions of the subordinates.
- Dr. Butler: Yes, that is perfectly true. I would not be in a position to make further comment about that particular point at this moment. I don't believe it would be helpful.
- Interviewer: The Sinn Fein statement last night makes another point about the Churches' position. It suggests that you might be better off directing your appeal against what it sees as the campaign of violence by the British Army. Are you making any entreaties to the British Army or what is your view of that statement?
- Dr. Butler: That's entering into, shall we say, future moves which I don't think would be helpful for me to discuss at this moment.
- Interviewer: Would it be relevant to the sort of ceasefire you want from the Provisional I.R.A.?
- Dr. Butler: It might well be relevant, but at this stage it is not the most important point.
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In response to requests from the Press for comment by the Government on the statement made by the Bishop of Connor, Rt. Rev. Dr. Arthur Butler where he said on an RTE interview

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The Government wish to make clear that they understand that the meeting with the IRA leaders, the Bishop and his colleagues was motivated by an earnest desire to bring about peace. Unfortunately there is reason to believe that, far from promoting peace, contacts of this kind and the publicity that accompanies them serve the purpose of the IRA propaganda, thereby helping to legitimise their campaign of murder. The distinction which the Bishop seeks to make between the elite of the IRA and the rank and file, in terms of morality, is untenable. Murders are committed by rank and file on the orders of their superiors, for example the recent murders of two judges in Belfast were not merely ordered by these superiors, but publicly boasted of by them as military acts.

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