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16th June, 1975.

Dear Mr. Kennedy,

I have been asked by the Taoiseach to reply to your letter of 23rd May, 1975 about the killings of Catholics in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach shares your concern and many representations on the subject have been made to the British Government who are responsible for law and order in Northern Ireland. Repeated assurances have been received that they are doing their utmost to discharge their responsibility effectively. It is understood that in the recent past, both the British Army and the RUC have increased their forces in the areas mainly affected, intensified their patrolling along lines where the two communities adjoin and their checking of individuals and cars. The RUC have also redeployed more detectives to Dungannon and Belfast.

Unfortunately, random killings - which are being done on both sides - pose extremely difficult problems, both in prevention and detection, precisely because they are random. In spite of the problems involved the British authorities are having an increasing measure of success. In the period since the beginning of this year over 150 persons carrying illegally held guns have been apprehended; 49 people have been charged with murder, compared with 75 throughout the whole of last year; and 52 people have been charged with attempted murder, compared with 80 last year. In 1974 those charged for murder and attempted murder were almost equally divided between Catholics and Protestants. This year, those charged have been mainly Protestants.

The British authorities' view is that it is only when investigations into a case have been completed and charges made that it can be said, with certainty rather than suspicion, that a member of one community was killed by a member of the other community for purely sectarian reasons. It is understood that 45 cases of identified sectarian murders have led to charges being made. Thirty-five of the forty-five have been dealt with so far. As a consequence:-

- (a) 28 persons (24 Protestants and 4 Roman Catholics) have been convicted of murder in 21 of the 35 cases;
- (b) 5 persons (3 Protestants and 2 Roman Catholics) have been convicted of manslaughter in 3 of the 35 cases;
- (c) 2 charges of murder were not proceeded with as the accused had already received a sentence of life imprisonment;
- (d) 2 cases ended in acquittals;
- (e) 7 cases had to be withdrawn.

I am to say that the Government, in line with its policy of taking all action open to it to eliminate violence throughout Ireland will continue to impress on the British authorities, as may be necessary, ^{the} necessity to do all in their power to prevent random killings and to bring those who perpetrate them to justice.

Yours sincerely

Walter P Kirwan

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