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MEMORANDUM FOR THE GOVERNMENT

NORTHERN IRELAND

17 Meán Fómhair, 1975

Relief of distress

TREATMENT OF CASUALTIES:

1. The Taoiseach refers to his Memorandum dated 23 Aibreán, 1975, on the relief of distress resulting from the Northern Ireland situation. In response to concern at the lack of detailed plans to treat numerous casualties from Northern Ireland if that should suddenly become necessary, the Taoiseach approved the confidential consultations, suggested in the Memorandum, between the Department of Health and the Chief Executive Officers of the North Western and North Eastern Health Boards, whose areas together cover the entire Border. These consultations have taken place, confidentially. As a result, it has been agreed that

- (a) as a planning and reporting aid, a checklist should be drawn up itemising the matters for appropriate action by the Department of Health and by the CEOs, respectively; and
- (b) planning by the CEOs and the Department within strict constraints should proceed and the CEOs, should undertake necessary consultations under the umbrella of and limited to matters relevant to the Major Accident Plan for the area which each health board has and is known to have.

The planning involved is going ahead.

2. In Dublin, the Hospital Accident Plan for the city has been reviewed within the Department of Health. All present indications are that special consultations with the Dublin hospitals regarding the treatment of injured Northern refugees need not be held and that the needs of such refugees could be met as planned by the Dublin hospitals within the context

of the Hospital Accident Plan, if necessary, subject to reinforcement at certain key points.

ADVANCE PURCHASES OF SUPPLIES TO CATER FOR REFUGEES:

3. Paragraph 10 of the Memorandum of 23 Aibreán, 1975, recommended that advance orders for sufficient supplies and equipment should be placed to cater for up to 20,000 refugees, in such a way as to minimise knowledge of the orders. That was in line with a recommendation of the Inter-Departmental Unit on Northern Ireland (IDU) in a report appended to the Memorandum of 23 Aibreán. In suggesting provision for 20,000 refugees, the Unit was seeking to balance the conflicting requirements of preparedness and secrecy. It considered that the placing of orders on that scale would not lead to any significant degree of speculation about the purpose of the orders and would avoid the possible adverse consequences in relation to Northern Ireland of such speculation. In its observations on the previous proposals the Department of Defence stated that little advantage was seen in a proposal to cater for 20,000 refugees if it is conceded that there is a possibility that up to 100,000 persons might seek sanctuary in the State and that the Minister for Defence would be in favour of asking for a Government direction whether advance purchases should be made for 20,000, 50,000 or 100,000 refugees.
4. The question now arises as to whether the Government should decide, in the light of developments in the

interval, to make purchases sufficient to provide for 20,000 or 50,000 refugees. Relevant factors include:-

- (a) events in Northern Ireland;
- (b) the budgetary situation; and
- (c) the assistance that might be forthcoming from international humanitarian organisations concerned with refugees.

The Government will be receiving a separate assessment of the political situation in Northern Ireland. Provisions for 20,000 refugees would cost about £320,000. For 50,000 the cost would be £800,000. The greatest number of refugees received on any single occasion in the past was just under 10,000. The Government are aware of the grave budgetary situation from recent Memoranda submitted by the Minister for Finance.

5. Information on the assistance that would be forthcoming from international organisations suggests that the assistance might be less speedy and might have more serious implications than had previously been thought. It appears that the speedy action in Cyprus on the part of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was due to the fact that it had three weeks in which to get organised, this being the interval between the first Turkish landing and the second push which caused most of the movement of persons. Normally, ICRC cannot react to an emergency situation as quickly as it did in Cyprus. There is also a question as to whether it would be politic to make a request for assistance to the ICRC as it appears that such a request is usually taken to imply the

the existence of a state of war. The country's international standing also arises in relation to securing any substantial financial assistance from the international humanitarian organisations. It seems that this could only be obtained by an appeal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

6. Balancing those factors the Taoiseach feels that it would now be prudent for the Government to decide on placing advance orders for sufficient supplies and equipment to cater for up to 20,000 or 50,000 refugees. An early Government decision is necessary because of the possible delay of, perhaps, up to six months, in securing deliveries of the supplies and equipment in question. While more recent indications are that suppliers are fulfilling orders more speedily than before, as a result of general slackness of demand, it is possible that the contingency for which these preparations are necessary could occur well within the interval required to secure deliveries. If the supplies are not used for that purpose they can be used in time for normal requirements.

VIEWS OF OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

7. The Departments of Finance, Foreign Affairs, Defence, Health and Justice have been consulted. The Department of Justice had no observations while those of the Department of Health were limited to supplying additional information now incorporated into the Memorandum.

8. The Department of Finance would have no objection to the extra expenditure involved, on the understanding that, if the Government should decide as requested by the Minister for Finance in the Memorandum (S.333/1/75) at present before the Government to direct all Departments not to undertake any excess expenditures unless these can be offset by savings elsewhere in the Departmental allocation, the Government would specifically except the expenditure now proposed on supplies for refugees from the decision since there will be no savings this year in the Defence allocation and, indeed, a supplementary estimate for Defence will have to be introduced this year. The Department states that some provision for the present proposal would have to be made in that supplementary estimate since, because of the present faster pace of delivery of supplies, some expenditure would be likely to be incurred this year.
9. The Department of Foreign Affairs, while concerned about the increased likelihood of publicity arising from placing orders for bedding and blankets to cater for 50,000 rather than 20,000 refugees considers that on balance that risk must be taken and orders for the higher number should be placed. ^{N.P. 10} [The Department of Defence state that their Minister agrees with the proposals regarding advance purchases. The Department feels that it would be necessary to advise City and County Managers of the intention to stockpile supplies since the handling and eventual

use of these stocks would be dealt with by the Civil Defence staff of the local authorities. The Department states that in fact the physical problem of storage could probably not be solved without using local authorities' accommodation and that it might even be necessary that such accommodation would have to be supplemented by renting extra storage. The storage problems would, of course, be much less if provision were being made for 20,000 refugees rather than for 50,000.

DECISION SOUGHT:

11. The Taoiseach recommends that the Government decide, having regard to their assessment of the Northern situation, on the purchase of supplies and equipment for 20,000 or 50,000 refugees, and to except the expenditure involved from any decision they may take on excess expenditures of Departments generally, on foot of the Minister for Finance's Memorandum (S.333/1/75) at present before them.