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Meeting at Dail Eireann on 1 May 1980

Attendance: Mr. Hugh Conahan, T.D.
Mr. Edward Filgate, T.D.
Dr. Rory O'Hanlon, T.D.
Mr. James Leonard, T.D.
Mr. G. O'Connor, Department of Foreign Affairs

Main Points

1. Dr. Rory O'Hanlon, T.D.

A. Incidents at Lifford Bridge Strabane on 13 February and at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast recently where guns were discharged by British soldiers indicate that these weapons were carried without the safety catch in place. These are non-high risk areas where large numbers of people circulate and consequently safety procedures should be applied.

B. Very young soldiers are operating at checkpoints without the apparent supervision of officers.

2. Mr. Edward Filgate T.D.

A. Only mature members of the British Army should be along the border.

B. There is indiscriminate detention of persons in the border region. While we have not complained about the Acts authorising such detentions such as the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 and the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976, persons detained should be informed of their rights under the Acts. This is not the case at the present time.

3. Mr. Hugh Conahan, T.D.

A. Why do the British authorities insist on so many permanent

checkpoints along the border with Co. Donegal when the security situation in other areas along the border appears to be more serious? There are permanent checkpoints at the present time at Muff, Mullennan, Strabane and a new checkpoint at Clady Bridge. Random checks by security forces in the border region would be an alternative to fixed checkpoints.

B. The use of Scottish regiments at checkpoints is resented by the people because of their manner.

C. The police are present at checkpoints and spend their time investigating minor matters such as the state of vehicles.

4. Mr. James Leonard, T.D.

A. While our police and troops patrol the border right up to the boundary it would seem that on the Northern side a fairly deep strip is covered only by spot patrols. In view of the regular claims by British that security on our side of the border is not adequate this weakness in their approach should be pointed out.

B. It should be impressed on the British authorities that border security should be made as far as possible, a police action and the British Army should keep a low profile.

C. When the British Army must be used it is essential that the troops used on this very sensitive operation be suitably screened so as to eliminate the kind of trigger-happy incidents that have taken place recently on a number of occasions. Such incidents do not deter the men of violence and indeed contribute in great measure to build up sympathy for them on both sides of the border. The victims of such incidents have almost invariably been totally innocent

D. Most people crossing back and forth over the border are merely travelling to or from work, visiting relations, attending Church, going to an outfarm, or some other everyday activity. It would appear that the attitude of some British troops is based on a view that it is a conventional border between two totally different

peoples and cultures. In fact people travelling in the area are only continuing the practice of previous generations.