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STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS ON MARCHES,

15 JULY 1986

I have deliberately kept public silence about the events in Northern Ireland in order not to aggravate an already inflamed situation. It is necessary not to clear up misunderstandings which may have arisen about my position.

Nationalists have been dismayed by the events in the past ten days. They have suffered at the hands of thugs and bully boys. Their lives have been at risk, there has been one tragic death and many serious injuries. Nationalists' property has been vandalised, and their right to equal treatment under the law denied.

My concern has been to see that nationalists are protected, particularly those in enclaves which are vulnerable to attack by sectarian mobs. Throughout the last ten days I have remained in constant contact with the situation on the ground. I have received detailed information from responsible leaders of the nationalist community, for which I wish to thank them. I have taken full account of this information in the messages which I have sent directly to the Secretary of State through the channels established by the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

I share the deep resentment of nationalists in Northern Ireland about certain operational decisions made by the RUC on the routing of marches and I have made my views known in strong terms to Mr. King. It is intolerable that provocative demands by unionist marchers should be listened to. I want nationalists to know that I am determined to see to it that their interests are safeguarded and that their physical security is protected.

I want to say also that I am shocked by the Sinn Fein/IRA attacks on members of the majority community. I condemn all this violence.

I call for restraint from all sides at this dangerous time. I call especially on the leaders of unionist opinion to show their abhorrence of unionist violence and to do everything in their power to prevent it.