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ON BEHALF OF	THAR CEANN
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Newry Murder - Release of PIRA Offenders

Following a meeting of the Government this afternoon (10 November) at which the Minister for Justice, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, T.D., briefed her Cabinet colleagues on the shooting dead of a person in the course of a Post Office raid in Newry this morning, the Minister has issued the following statement.

First, on behalf of the Government the Minister extends her sincere sympathy to the family and friends of the deceased on their tragic loss. While it is sadly the case that no action on anybody's part can reverse what has happened nor in any way ease the pain and suffering now visited upon the bereaved, it is important that the perpetrators should know that their action is deplored by people of this country, that they stand alone and reviled and that it is the fervent wish of all right-thinking people that they will swiftly be brought to justice.

Because of the fact that initial reports from the Gardai, based on their contacts with the R.U.C., suggested the possible participation of a member or members of the Provisional IRA in this crime, the Minister had no option but to put a stop on the planned release of nine Provisional IRA prisoners which had already been announced.

These releases were based specifically on the premise that the Provisional IRA campaign of violence was over for good. One effect of a total cessation was that it became possible, in the case of Provisional IRA offenders to review all sentences and in particular to take account of the fact of the cessation when considering in each case the likely threat to the community if the offender were released.

However, in view of the initial intelligence reports on this morning's shooting, it became necessary, pending clarification of the situation, to reconsider in the case of each offender, the question of risk to the community, in the light of that shooting. It was necessary, therefore, again pending clarification, to put a stop to the releases due to commence tomorrow.

The Minister considers it right also to comment on various suggestions which have been made about her decision to signal that, as a consequence of the ending of the Provisional IRA campaign of violence, certain Provisional IRA offenders would be granted early release from custody.

On the 2nd of September, long before any Provisional IRA prisoner files were submitted to her for consideration, the Minister, in a public statement, made it clear not only that some such offenders would probably be granted early release, but also outlined the precise criteria which would be applied in examining individual cases.

It was not, as some appear to believe, a matter of thanking any individuals or any organisation for their part in ending the campaign of violence. The position is that, in the cases in question, the only factor which stood in the way of granting early release was that their release might constitute a threat to the community for as long as the violence campaign on the outside was ongoing. With that threat removed, by virtue of the cessation of violence, it was reasonable that each of these cases be reviewed afresh. This is what happened.

The Minister wishes to point out that what was involved in each case was conditional release. She also wishes to say that the nine offenders who were given their release dates yesterday have today been informed that these dates have been withdrawn, pending clarification. She wishes to say, too, that, because standard remission in Northern Ireland is higher than that which applies here, some of those given release dates yesterday would have been freed earlier had they received similar sentences in Northern Ireland.

Finally, the Minister, wishes to stress that there is absolutely no foundation for the suggestion that she planned to release a much larger number of offenders but changed her mind about the numbers to be released, because of pressure or because of fear of likely public reaction to her decisions. No final decisions were made - nor could they be made - on these cases until all necessary enquiries had been completed. These enquiries were not completed until yesterday.

It is a matter of regret that speculation from various sources had put the numbers likely to be released well beyond what was being contemplated and that there was totally unfounded speculation about named individuals. The Minister, however, cannot be held accountable for this speculation. It was right in the Minister's view to signal her general intention to consider the early release of offenders, as that had become the subject of speculation and the subject of numerous queries to her office long before the cessation of violence was announced. She was not in a position, however, to say anything about her precise intentions until the enquiries mentioned had been completed and the offenders themselves informed.