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Secure Fax no.

18 September 1996

To: Belfast

From: HQ

For: M. Tierney

From: E. McKee

Church Blockades, North Antrim

In view of public statements which have been made by those involved in the weekend's blockading of Catholic Churches in North Antrim, grateful if you would raise this matter with the other side along the following lines;

1. Convey our concern at this further deterioration in community relations which, taken with the economic boycotts proffers a very dismal picture of community relations in rural areas and is in itself a disturbing trend. At the very least, it will further complicate efforts to resolve the parades issue.
2. Specifically on the Church blockades, convey our belief that Church goers are entitled to worship free of intimidation and harassment and that every effort should be made to ensure that these blockades do not inhibit or impede those wishing to attend religious services. Ensuring the 'safe passage' as it were of intending Church-goers and compliance with the law on those mounting protests, is all the more important in the light of recent setbacks to nationalist confidence in the security forces.
3. Acknowledge the presence of the RUC outside the relevant churches last weekend but at the same time suggest that the description "passed off without incident" used in the sitrep (SF 946) is hardly adequate or accurate.
4. The other side will be aware of contacts between Sean Farren of the SDLP and the DUP's Ian Paisley on this matter and that DUP Councillor McAllister has repeated calls for further blockades. It would be useful to have an assessment from the other side on the prospects for the coming weekend.

END