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FOR: M BROWNE/EMBASSY, LONDON **FROM**: B Nolan

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Comments by Ronnie Flanagan, Chief Constable

Sunday, 6 July 1997 Re Drumcree
cc RUC

Flanagan: For many months now it has been very clear that the raw nerves and intense feelings of people on both sides of the debate surrounding the Drumcree issue have been manipulated by evil people who want to use the issue as an excuse to reek outright violence. Since last year many people have worked tirelessly in an effort to bring about an agreed accommodation in this issue. Church leaders have been involved, politicians have been involved, the Secretary of State has worked heroically right up to the early hours of Saturday morning. The fact that all this effort brought forth no result should indicate the stark choice I was left with during Saturday. A simple stark choice in terms of balancing two evils, each evil bound to bring about serious violence. I had to make a decision in terms of which of these evils would be likely to bring about less violence. In all those circumstances I made a decision that the parade as proposed should proceed. I apologise to the people of the Garvaghy Road for the gross inconvenience this has caused and assure them that that inconvenience will be absolutely for as short a period as possible.

Interviewer: Have any conditions been imposed on the parade Chief Constable?

Flanagan: There will be conditions imposed to make sure that this parade passes quietly along Garvaghy Road and Drumcree Road.

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Interviewer: ....the parade as proposed originally?

Flanagan: Virtually so. Conditions will ensure that it is stewarded and quiet along that part of the route.

Interviewer: Even the bottom line Chief Constable, no matter how you view it, no matter what your security preoccupations might be, isn't the bottom line that the perception out there on the Garvaghy Road and in the nationalist community is, that you are giving cover to the Orangemen to parade through a Catholic and nationalist area? The bottom line is not how they see it.

Flanagan: I am taking a decision, have taken a decision most reluctantly to ensure that the people of Garvaghy Road, amongst other outcomes of this decision are not surrounded for days on end. I want to subject them to the minimum of inconvenience. I had to take a course of action that would result in less violence and I am talking about serious violence, I am talking about a risk of loss of life.

Interviewer: Chief Constable, the SDLP representative, Brid Rodgers, described the police operation this morning as totally disastrous and brutal in its implementation, how would you respond to that?

Flanagan: I would say that it was not brutal in its implementation, and as far as my officers are concerned, I want to make plain that the decision is mine. What they had to do, they had to do as a result of my decision. They can be judged in terms of how they achieve that, but as they moved into position they were met with an onslaught of violence, obviously a pre-prepared onslaught.

Interviewer: Chief Constable, does this decision not show that the security forces in Northern Ireland are unable to face down the might of Loyalism but are able to face down nationalism?

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Flanagan: No, it does not show that. The security forces are able to deal with any situation. I was left with a stark choice, how much life is liable to be lost, and that loss of life was liable to be in the Catholic community. These are the stark choices I was left with yesterday. That was the decision I made.

Interviewer: What do you mean that the loss of life was possibly in the Catholic community, what do you mean by that?

Flanagan: It was clear that there are paramilitary influences afoot here, paramilitary influences on both sides of this debate and I have no doubt that those paramilitary people wanted to use this issue as an excuse and I have no doubt that on one side paramilitary violence would have been reeked in terms of it being against the Catholic community, I have no doubt whatever about that.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Flanagan: I am not going to elaborate on the intelligence that I had to take into account in arriving at this decision. I think the fact that people have worked tirelessly for a year, the fact that people, as you well know, have used this issue, have worked on the raw nerves of people involved, the intense feelings of people who live along the Garvaghy Road, the intense feelings of people in fear of the people who want to march who feel their traditions are being lost. All of these have been cruelly and evilly manipulated to a point where violence was inevitable whichever course of action was chosen.

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