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NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

30 July 1998

PRISONER RELEASES TO BE KEPT UNDER CONTINUOUS REVIEW

The Secretary of State Dr Marjorie Mowlam MP last night said the process of prisoner releases would be kept under continuous review. Judgements about who is and who is not eligible would become more and more stringent over time.

Dr Mowlam was speaking in the debate on the Order under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act which specifies organisations which will not be eligible for the prisoner release provisions of the Good Friday Agreement.

Subject to Parliamentary approval members of four organisations will not be eligible for the scheme. The organisations are: the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), the Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA) and the 'Real' Irish Republican Army.

The Secretary of State said that she had reached her decision to designate these organisations after consideration of advice received from the RUC.

"Parliament has asked me to make a judgement whether, in each case, an organisation is maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire," she said.

"In deciding to specify these organisations I have taken full account of all four of the factors which the Prime Minister laid down during the Referendum campaign and all the information available to me.

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"These are tough decisions. I will keep them under review. If I consider an organisation no longer meets the conditions I will exclude them from the scheme. No more of their prisoners will be released and prisoners already released who still support them will be recalled."

Commenting on recent paramilitary activity, Dr Mowlam said: **"Since September 1994 (the first IRA ceasefire) there has been an appalling catalogue of punishment attacks - committed by both loyalist and republican groups. In each case the RUC has pursued those responsible vigorously.**

"Despite the Good Friday Agreement, those attacks have continued. As RUC Chief Constable, Ronnie Flanagan has said, members of both republican and loyalist organisations have been involved in violent criminal acts in recent weeks. The RUC is pursuing a line of enquiry which assumes that the recent brutal murder of Andrew Kearney was committed by members of the Provisional IRA.

"This pattern of brutal punishment attacks is unacceptable and must come to an end. Paramilitary organisations have shown their ability to stop these activities in the past. Now they must stop them for good.

"The judgements I have made today will be kept under continuous review. And that judgement will become more and more stringent over time.

"The Agreement offers a new start for Northern Ireland. The opportunities under the Agreement - whether that means taking part in the Executive of the Assembly or the North-South Council, or being eligible for prisoner releases - can only be there for organisations who are genuinely committed to a peaceful way forward."

NOTES TO EDITORS

An Order under section 3(8) of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act designating the four organisations will be debated in the House of Lords on Thursday 30 July.

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The Secretary of State will announce later today the names of those to be appointed as Sentence Review Commissioners. These are the people who will take decisions on eligibility for early release for individual prisoners on a case by case basis. She will also make an announcement on the procedures they will be required to follow.

The procedures to enable victims to request information about prisoner releases under the Act will be announced shortly.

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MOWLAM ANNOUNCES APPOINTMENT OF SENTENCE REVIEW COMMISSIONERS

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Dr Marjorie Mowlam today announced the appointment of 10 Sentence Review Commissioners. The appointments are required under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act which came into force this week.

Dr Mowlam said:

"The early release of prisoners is one of the most difficult parts of the Good Friday Agreement. The Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act provides the framework for releases and includes important safeguards for the protection of the public and to ensure that prisoners who support organisations that have not established or are not maintaining complete and unequivocal ceasefires will not be released early.

"The Commissioners I have appointed bring a range of relevant skills and experience to the work. I believe the people of Northern Ireland can have confidence that the Commissioners I have appointed will apply the tests in the legislation diligently and with due regard for the need to maintain public confidence in the arrangements."

The Secretary of State has appointed Sir John Blelloch and Brian Currin as Joint Chairmen of the Sentence Review Commissioners.

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The other Commissioners to be appointed are David Bolton, Silvia Casale, Peter Curran, Ian Dunbar, Adrian Grounds, Mary Gilpin, Clodagh McGrory and Dave Wall. (Pen pictures for each of the Commissioners are attached).

The Commissioners plan to meet early next week to begin work.

Notes for Editors

1. The appointments are made under section 1(1) of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 which received Royal Assent and came into force on 28 July.

2. In making appointments the Secretary of State is required to:

- appoint a chairman or chairmen;
- so far as reasonably practicable ensure that one of the Commissioners is a psychiatrist or pscychologist;
- so far as reasonably practicable ensure that one of the Commissioners is a lawyer, that is a person who holds a legal qualification in the United Kingdom;
- have regard to the desirability of the Commissioners as a group commanding widespread acceptance throughout the community in Northern Ireland.

3. Lord Dubs gave a commitment during the consideration of the Bill in the Lords that the Secretary of State would appoint a Commissioner with a knowledge of victims issues.

4. The Commissioners first tasks will be to settle their approach to their work within the Rules and agree application forms and information for prisoners so that they can begin to consider cases.

5. The Secretary of State has also today made procedural rules under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act. The Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 (Sentence Review Commissioners) Rules 1998 set out the procedures to be followed in making and considering applications to the Commissioners and related matters. The Rules come into force tomorrow.

6. The safeguards under the legislation include the conditions that each prisoner must satisfy to be granted a declaration of eligibility for early release, the power for the Secretary of State to refer cases back to the Commissioners, the licence provisions and arrangements for recall, the requirement to specify organisations that have not established and are not maintaining complete and unequivocal ceasefires, the power to vary the accelerated release provisons and the power to suspend the scheme as a whole.

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Pen Pictures

Sir John Blelloch was Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office from 1988 to 1990, having previously served as a Deputy Secretary in that Office from 1980 to 1982, while resident in Northern Ireland. Between these appointments he held the posts of Deputy Secretary (Policy) and then Second Permanent Under Secretary at the MOD. He is currenly Vice-Chairman of the Automobile Association and holds a number of other appointments on government committees and with volutary organisations.

Brian Currin is qualified as an attorney in South Africa and works in mediation and institutional transformation. In 1994 he was appointed by President Mandela to chair a Prison Audit Committee and was subsequently involved in the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In 1987 he founded the National Directorate of Lawyers for Human Rights which he headed for eight years. He has worked in Sri Lanka, Rwanda and the Middle East on political transformation.

David Bolton is a qualified social worker and is presently Director of Community Care with the Sperrin Lakeland Health and Social Services Trust. He was until recently the Chairperson of the Fermanagh District Partnership for Peace and Reconciliation. He has had experience working with and supporting those who have been affected by the violence, including the Enniskillen community following the Remembrance Day bombing in 1987.

Silvia Casale is an independent criminologist. She is the United Kingdom member of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and a consultant with HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. She has worked in Sweden and the United States and as a member of the Parole Board of England and Wales. She has published extensively on prison issues.

Peter Curran is a consultant psychiatrist based at the Mater Hospital, Belfast. He has an interest in the victims of violence and has lectured extensively on the psychological and social impact of civil disorder and political violence. He was a member of the Mental Health Commission for eight years.

Ian Dunbar CB retired from his position as Director of Inmate Administration and as a member of the Board of the Prison Service of England and Wales in 1994. He was previously Director of Prisons for the South West Region and had been the Governor of a number of prisons in England and Wales. He also worked for HM Inspectorate of Prisons and conducted the inquiry into disturbances at Risley Remand Centre.

Mary Gilpin is an ex-probation officer from Scotland and a retired social worker. She was a member of the Board of Visitors for HMP Maze from 1985 to 1997 and served two terms as Chairman as well as being Secretary to the Northern Ireland Association of Members of Boards of Visitors. She was involved in setting up Dismas House, a hostel for use by prisoners and their families.

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Dr Adrian Grounds has been University Lecturer in Forensic Psychiatry at the Institute of Criminology and Department of Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge since 1987. He is an Honorary Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist at Addenbrookes Hospital NHS Trust. Between 1984 and 1987 he was a Clinical Lecturer and Senior Registrar in Forensic Psychiatry at Broadmoor Hospital and the Institute of Psychiatry, London.

Clodagh McGrory was called to the Northern Ireland Bar in September 1990. She practised as a barrister until 1995 and has remained involved in broad-based human rights work. She is currently employed at Law Centre (NI) and she was appointed as a member of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights in January 1998.

Dave Wall has been Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders since 1987. He currently serves on the Northern Ireland Partnership Board and on a sub-committee of the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust responsible for allocating Peace and Reconciliation funding to ex-prisoner organisations.

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