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21 July 1998 **No of pages including this one: 2**

To: HQ **From: Belfast**
For: Secretary Gallagher **From: Joint Secretary**

Subj: Wright and Fisher

1. I asked Peter Bell yesterday to comment on a hint by Lord Dubs in the Lords last week that the two Scots Guardsmen, Wright and Fisher, may be released in the second half of August before the accelerated prisoner releases get underway in early September.

2. Bell effectively confirmed that this is the Secretary of State's intention. While denying for the record any linkage between the release of Wright and Fisher and the batch of releases which will come on stream in September, he tacitly acknowledged that the Guardsmen will be let out in order to soften up Conservative and Unionist opinion in the run-up to the release of paramilitary prisoners.

3. Bell recalled the sustained pressure applied by the Conservatives to the Secretary of State in relation to Wright and Fisher during the Parliamentary debate on the NI (Sentences) Bill. She believes that it is politically necessary, in the interest of consolidating Conservative and Unionist support for accelerated release, that she show that the beneficiaries of these arrangements will be not merely convicted terrorists. She sees merit in demonstrating that members of the security forces who are serving sentences in connection with the troubles in Northern Ireland will not be disadvantaged.

4. The release of Wright and Fisher could come about in one of two ways. Either the Secretary of State would recommend that the Queen exercise the Royal Prerogative of Mercy or she would refer the case to the Life Sentence Review Board (who are due, as

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it is, to consider the case at their meeting next October). Bell thought the former route more likely, on grounds of timing. You may have noted that the Lords passed a petition last night which urged the Queen to exercise the Royal Prerogative of Mercy in this case.

5. While recognising the political pressures on the Secretary of State, I warned that blatant capitulation by the British Government to an intensive lobbying campaign on behalf of Wright and Fisher would go down badly in the nationalist community, where memories of the Thain and Clegg cases are still fresh, and that questions would again be asked about the impartiality of the administration of justice in Northern Ireland.

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Pages: (Including This Header Page) ~~Four~~ Three	
Comments: For information	

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L108/98 **6 July 1998**

REVIEW OF CASES OF GUARDSMEN FISHER AND WRIGHT

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Dr Marjorie Mowlam MP, has begun a further review of the cases of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright.

Following a statement by Lord Dubs during the debate on the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill in the House of Lords, the Secretary of State confirmed the decision in the light of correspondence which she has received from the Guardsmens' solicitors.

"I have received papers on the case today and will be considering those papers during the next few weeks. The papers which have to be considered are extensive. They include those of the court, previous advice from the Life Sentence Review Board, my own previous decisions and the various judicial review judgements. They must be given full and detailed consideration. I will also take account of the many representations I have received regarding the case," Dr Mowlam said.

"I cannot pre-judge any decisions which I may make as a consequence of this further review, but when a decision has been made I will make it known," she said.

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Notes to editors:

1. The Scots Guardsmen James Fisher and Mark Wright were convicted of the murder of Peter McBride while they were on patrol in Belfast in 1992.

2. The Guardsmen were each sentenced to life imprisonment at Belfast Crown Court on 10 February 1995.

3. Their appeals to the Court of Appeal against conviction and sentence were dismissed on 21 December 1995 and they were refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords on 8 March 1996.

4. The Guardsmens' cases are scheduled to be considered by the Life Sentence Review Board in October 1998.

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NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

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