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NORTHERN IRELAND
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SECRETARY OF STATE ANNOUNCES DECISION ON GUARDSMEN FISHER AND WRIGHT

It was announced on 4 July that the Secretary of State would review these cases again following receipt of correspondence from the Guardsmen's solicitor.

The Secretary of State's decision

The Secretary of State has now concluded that review. Guardsmen Fisher and Wright have today been released on life licence from Maghaberry prison. Each man has now served approximately 6 years' imprisonment. This period includes the time spent in close military custody prior to conviction and sentence.

The cases have been considered earlier than usual because of the circumstances under which the offences, of which the Guardsmen were convicted, took place, and also their lack of pre-meditation.

The Secretary of State said:

"Since I commenced my review the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 has become law. While I am aware that the Guardsmen have applied to the Sentence Review Commission for early release, I nevertheless felt it right to continue with my review which was initiated following receipt of the solicitors' petition submitted on behalf of the Guardsmen.

"I am conscious that the Sentences Act enables the earlier release of prisoners who were engaged in terrorism. The Guardsmen were in

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Northern Ireland as a consequence of that terrorism and committed the offence while on duty to counter it. I am now also aware that the first possible releases under the new legislation could take place from 7 September onwards.

"Having taken all of these matters, and all other available information into account and having consulted with the Lord Chief Justice, as required by statute, I have decided that the Guardsmen should now be released on life licence."

Note to Editors

A statutory power permits the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to release on licence any person serving life imprisonment. Before doing so the Secretary of State must be satisfied that the prisoner has served a sufficient period in custody, including while on remand, to reflect the individual circumstances of the particular offence and also be satisfied that release would not constitute an unacceptable risk to the public. If a licensee's subsequent behaviour presents a danger to the public the Secretary of State may recall him to prison to resume his sentence in custody.

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