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NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

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GOVERNMENT PUBLISHES NAREY REPORT ON MAZE PRISON

The report by Martin Narey into events at the Maze prison has made 59 recommendations on improving security to help ensure such incidents do not happen again. The Government today published the report into the escape of IRA prisoner Liam Averill and the murder of LVF prisoner Billy Wright in HMP Maze in December 1997. The report is unable to draw definitive conclusions on how guns were smuggled into the prison or whether or not the tower had been stood down although it says that ultimately, this would probably not have stopped the murder of Billy Wright.

The report points out that the Maze is a unique prison in housing, in segregated conditions, over 500 terrorist inmates in one location and points out how the regime of the prison has developed over the years in the face of intimidation of staff and civil unrest.

Mr Narey states:

"For reasons this report makes clear the Maze does not and, in our view, cannot be run like other top security prisons in the United Kingdom. This point is not appreciated by much of the media and has led to some damaging publicity. Not infrequently the Maze is caricatured as a holiday camp. It is nothing of the sort. It is a prison which, while tolerating relatively high levels of prisoner freedom on the wings had, until December 1997, and for fourteen years, an enviable security record."

He also recognises the impact events at the Maze can have on the wider community. He says:

"The treatment of paramilitary prisoners has for many years been a focus of acute community and international interest. Prison issues are exploited fully by paramilitary groups for propaganda purposes and the significance of individual issues is regularly amplified to secure wider support."

The Secretary of State announced publication of the report in a statement to the House of Commons a full text of which is attached. She also drew attention to the particular difficulties of the Maze particularly for staff.

"Staff at all levels in the Prison Service and their families have been subjected to a campaign of intimidation and attack directed against them. Since the start of the troubles, 29 members of staff have been murdered by paramilitaries. In 1996/7 alone, there were 122 reported threats against staff and a further 50 officers had to be given special protection. This campaign has been waged against staff in an effort by prisoners and their supporters to impose their will.

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"Last weekend there was a live bomb attempt on the home of a female prison officer in Portadown and in the early hours of Monday morning a bomb exploded under the car of a retired prison officer living in Carrickfergus."

Dr Mowlam said that recent incidents had raised significant questions about the safety of individual prisoners, which go beyond the scope of Martin Narey's report. She has asked Sir David Ramsbotham to specifically address the issue of prisoner safety during his current inspection of the Maze.

The Secretary of State also announced that following the death of a remand prisoner in the Maze, prisoners who would previously have been moved quickly to the prison will be held in the committal prison HMP Maghaberry for a period to give the prison authorities more time to be assured about the safety of such a move. However "even with the most rigorous and severe prison regimes it is impossible to guarantee that serious incidents will not happen."

Dr Mowlam went on to detail some enhancing of security that has already taken place as a result of the Steele Report. Among these measures are:

- morning and evening headcounts
- each day five randomly selected cells per block are given a fabric check
- full block searches are now a weekly feature, one block being searched each Thursday
- material coming from stores is now exchanged on a "new for old" basis
- shadow boards are now in place in each block for handicraft tools
- all prisoners on interblock moves are searched

Additional measures which have been taken since Mr Narey began his investigation included:

- regular full block searches on a random basis
- regular security checks of all H block fences
- new arrangements for weekend coverage of staffing shortfalls on visits
- new arrangements for searching prisoners on visits and for x-raying their parcels
- new arrangements for counting visitors at parties

Finally, the Secretary of State endorsed Mr Narey's report and assured the House that his recommendations will be carried forward vigorously. She said:

"The fact remains as Martin Narey has concluded, "the challenge of the Maze is greater than that of any other establishment in the United Kingdom." I regard it as critically important, therefore, that we act quickly on the Narey inquiry recommendations and we will do so.

"Implementing the Narey report in full will be a considerable task for the Northern Ireland Prison Service. However, I am confident that it can and will meet this challenge."

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