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OIFIG AN AIRE GNOTHAÍ EACHTRACHA
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2
DUBLIN 2

Mr. Joe Higgins TD
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

5 March 1998

Our Ref: AI980184

Dear Joe,

Thank you for your letter of 9 February regarding Eddie Butler, Hugh Doherty, Harry Duggan and Joe O'Connell which has been forwarded to me for reply by the Taoiseach.

I am, of course, aware of the cases of these four men. I shared the concern felt at the delay in the determination of their tariffs and in my reply to representations which I received regarding their circumstances, I gave assurances that the Government would continue to pursue the matter with the British authorities.

On 30 January, the British Home Secretary decided to set whole life tariffs on the four men concerned. I am advised that the cases of prisoners with whole life tariffs are reviewed by the Home Secretary after twenty five years in custody and at five year intervals thereafter.

On 10 November 1997, the Home Secretary spoke of his policy on revising, either by reducing or increasing, the tariff of a mandatory life sentence. In this context, he said that he would be open to the possibility that, in exceptional circumstances, including for example exceptional progress by the prisoner whilst in custody, a review and reduction of the tariff might be appropriate. He said that he would have this possibility in mind when reviewing at the twenty five year point the cases of prisoners given a whole life tariff.

As you are aware, in the context of the peace process the Government attaches importance to the transfer of Republican prisoners imprisoned in England to this jurisdiction. Eddie Butler, Hugh Doherty, Harry Duggan and Joe O'Connell all made their applications to the British Home Office for a transfer to this jurisdiction during 1995. I am informed that since the determination of their tariffs, each of their transfer applications was formally transmitted to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform by the Home Office. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform recently gave his consent to their transfer to this jurisdiction and their applications have been returned to the Home Office where they will be processed further.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely,

David Andrews T.D.
Minister for Foreign Affairs

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