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To: HQ **From: Belfast**
To: C O Floinn **From: Val O'Donnell**

Copied directly to D. Cole, A/Sec, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Subj: Briefing on Orange Volunteers/Red Hand Defenders: Other security matters

1. We received a briefing, as promised, from David Watkins and Stephen Leach on the above, today, following a meeting in the Secretariat about Drumcree (reported on separately by the Joint Secretary).

2. The following were the main points made:

- The RUC believe that the three loyalist paramilitary groups

  - The Orange Volunteers
  - The Red Hand Defenders
  - Justice for Protestants

  are effectively one and the same "shadowy" grouping of individuals, although they may not comprise a single organisation, at this stage. They include a fundamentalist Protestant "Bible-thumping" element, and some individuals who may have been loosely associated with the LVF in the past but who dissent from the LVF's stance on the ceasefire/decommissioning. Watkins said he did not believe drugs to be an element in the Orange Volunteers, which he attributed to the LVF.

- The RUC are convinced that the grouping does not operate under LVF command structures, or under its leadership. Comments by PUP representatives (Ervine and Hutchinson) about LVF associations with the grouping, must be interpreted against the long-running antipathy between the PUP/UVF and the LVF.

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- The apparent lack of success by the RUC to date in the investigation of attacks by these loyalist groups, in terms of arrests and charges is due primarily to the need to penetrate this new and disparate grouping "organisationally", and to achieve a quality flow of intelligence in relation to their activities. But the RUC think they know who are involved.

- The grouping is tending increasingly to use the name "Orange Volunteers" in connection with their attacks. This appears to be due to the greater resonance this title may have for Protestants at the present time, as well as connections with the past (e.g. the now defunct Orange Volunteers organisation of the 1970s).

- The grouping is described as "fairly small" at present. We were told that the RUC have not yet quantified overall membership, but there is a danger that it could grow further in appeal/strength They believe that the areas of strength are in Belfast, Portadown and Antrim,. Watkins/Leach were reserved on the issue of whether the grouping could be described as already constituting a "province-wide threat" at this stage.

3. Attack on family home in Armagh on 28/12/98

We asked again for further information about this attack, including whether there had been a subsequent claim of responsibility by any organisation, (e.g. the Orange Volunteers). The pipe-bomb attack on the home bore similarities to the attack claimed by the Orange Volunteers on the Shields home in Loughinisland on 19/1/99. Watkins/Leach were unable to provide further information, but Leach prmised to make enquiries and revert to us.

4. Woodbourne RUC station attacks: Shooting on 14/1/99 and petrol bomb attack on 15/1/99

Watkins said that these attacks were worrying and very dangerous. The RUC are attributing the attacks to CIRA. There is concern about CIRA infiltration into some North Belfast areas. The success of the RUC in making arrests in the immediate aftermath of the incidents, and the recovery of arms, petrol bombs etc may have defused a serious threat! Four persons were expected to appear in court today in

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connection with the incidents.

Later media reports confirmed that 4 men, all with addresses in West Belfast, were charged in court today with possession of an AKM rifle, a handgun and ammunition. They were named as

Sean O' Reilly (23) of Ardkeen View
Brendan Burns (20) of St James' Gardens
Carl (Karl) Reilly (22) of Beechmount Street
Thomas Crossan (27) of Rodney Parade

They were remanded to the Maze Court until 10 February.

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