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Ms Griffin 3
Passed on to the Taoiseach
18-1-2000

BY SECURE FAX

13 January 2000

For: Gary Ansbro, AI Division **From: Colm Ó Floinn, Embassy London**

Meeting with the RUC Police Federation

1. As already advised, a delegation from the Police Federation of Northern Ireland called on the Ambassador yesterday morning, prior to going to Downing Street to hand in a petition as part of the "Defend the RUC" campaign, orchestrated by the *Daily Telegraph* and others. I have already faxed the press release being issued today on the petition, together with the covering letter to PM Blair (both are attached again for ease of reference).

2. The delegation included Les Rodgers, Chairman of the Police Federation, his colleague David McClurg (also a serving RUC officer), Alan Burnside, public affairs adviser to the Federation and managing director of "Citigate Northern Ireland" and two RUC widows, Mrs. Christine Ede and Mrs. Iona Meyers. They were accompanied by Ruth Dudley Edwards. Ms Edwards informed us that Lord Cranborne was unable to be present due to flu. I was also present.

3. The visitors covered the same ground as in their meeting with yourself and Alma Ní Choigligh on 25 November (Alma very helpfully provided us with her report of this meeting and other material in advance of this morning's meeting), with particular emphasis on the name/badge and policing board issues. They expressed warm appreciation of the Ambassador's willingness to receive them and the time he gave them. Their own presentation was courteous and they put considerable emphasis on a simple need to recognise the contribution of the RUC and to treat its members and families with dignity. The two RUC widows spoke movingly of their personal experience and the loss of many other friends in the force (the *Daily Telegraph* poster of the RUC dead was used in support). They clearly feel a personal sense of bitterness at the treatment of the RUC families not only in Patten ("the children are not even mentioned in Patten") but also over the years.

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4. One point was perhaps developed with somewhat greater emphasis than at previous meetings with our side. This was their view that the RUC full-time reserve should be maintained in the face of a continuing terrorist threat. McClurg also expressed concern that abolition of the reserve would put intolerable strain on the RUC benevolent fund which he said had just issued cheques of £1,000 each to 84 widows of RUC officers killed in the early period of the troubles, who do not benefit from more generous pension provisions subsequently introduced. (The issue of the full-time reserve is also raised in the attached press release and letter.)

5. Despite their fairly restrained presentation, the visitors, and Rodgers in particular, did not hide their fundamental doubts about the commitment of Sinn Féin to a peaceful way forward. On a number of occasions the Ambassador emphasised his understanding of the appalling suffering endured by the two widows and all the other RUC families and the need to hear their accounts at first hand. He pointed out that the fact that our policy position on the implementation of the Patten Report as an essential element in the building of a peaceful future for the North differed from that of the visitors did not inhibit our willingness to hear or recognise their concerns. The Ambassador also made clear that, while we heard the doubts being expressed, we were convinced of the commitment of the Republican leadership to the political process.

6. Before they left on their way to Downing Street, Rodgers raised the possibility of a meeting with the Taoiseach (he had earlier referred in appreciative terms to the previous meetings in Dublin, including with Dr. Mansergh). The Federation felt the time might now be ripe for such a meeting. The Ambassador assured the visitors that he would convey this request to the Taoiseach and that their concerns as expressed at the meeting would also be reported to him.

END

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Press Release

Maura
PLEASE FAX Gary Rubens
(note to follow)
12-1

Citigate

Issued on behalf of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland

12 January 2000

One-third of a million signatures in support of RUC campaign delivered to Downing Street

A petition containing over one-third of a million signatures has been presented today to the Prime Minister by the Police Federation for Northern Ireland.

The petition demands of Government ... "that no measures be taken to weaken the RUC's capacity to provide the first line of defence against republican and loyalist terrorism in these islands. Although we acknowledge and support the need for constructive change in policing in Northern Ireland we deplore the Patten Report's dishonouring of the sacrifice, courage and professionalism of the RUC in its recommendation that the force give up its proud name, badge and other symbols."

Mr Les Rodgers, Chairman of the Federation presented the petition accompanied by representatives of each of the federated ranks of the RUC together with two RUC widows whose husbands were murdered by terrorists.

Mr Rodgers said that the petition was being presented now as an announcement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was imminent, and although signatures were still coming in, presentation of the petition had to be made while there was still the opportunity to influence Government's thinking on the future of the police service.

"The sheer number of signatures shows the extent of the hurt felt by people over the proposals to abandon the name and badge of the RUC. Equally important has been the opposition to measures which would reduce the effectiveness of the police service in Northern Ireland."

Mr Rodgers also said that if the RUC was worthy of the award of the George Cross then surely it should also be worthy of its name and badge.

[more ...]

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Citigate

"The Federation also believes that if the Government is to push ahead with demilitarisation then it is crucial that the role of the full-time Reserve is maximised so that security resources remain capable of dealing with any threat. The extent of that threat must be determined by the Chief Constable rather than by political considerations," he said.

[Ends]

Note to Editors

1. The letter to the Prime Minister accompanying the petition is attached.

2. The petition has over one-third of a million signatures, almost 250,000 collected in Northern Ireland and 100,000 in Great Britain. In addition the website received 5000 hits and the Great Britain organisers of the campaign received 7000 letters.

3. For further information please contact Alan Burnside on 07768 300125.

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POLICE FEDERATION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Please reply to the Secretary

R.U.C. GARNERVILLE, GARNERVILLE ROAD, BELFAST, BT4 2NX. TELEPHONE: (01232) 760831. FAX: (01232) 761540

The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A

10 January 2000

Our Ref: LR/sk/Patt

Dear Prime Minister

I attach on behalf of this Federation a petition signed by almost one-third of a million people throughout the United Kingdom. Separately I know that many other people have mailed their petitions direct to Downing Street. In view of the impending statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the future of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, we have moved to present our petition now while there is the opportunity for the views of the signatories to be recognised in the Government's intentions for the police service.

My Federation has, of course, submitted its formal response to the Northern Ireland Office in which we have indicated significant support for the major part of the Report. However, as the wording of the petition says, there are several recommendations which can command neither the support of R.U.C. Officers, of all ranks, nor many of the people of Northern Ireland and mainland Britain. These flawed elements would seriously undermine the effective policing of Northern Ireland and the protection of the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland against terrorism.

As it presently stands, the Patten Report dishonours the reputation of the R.U.C. by recommending that our name and badge should be abandoned. The report also introduces (despite its claim to do the opposite) politics into the heart of policing through the creation of a politicised police board. The report also includes recommendations which would allow district councils to buy in private sector support for the police, thereby raising the very real prospect of the legitimisation of vigilantism by paramilitaries. The recommendation regarding the R.U.C. Reserve Full-time should be handled sensitively and should be aligned to the security situation as envisaged by the Chief Constable

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Furthermore, we believe that the full implementation of the Report even if attempted 'on a sensitive basis' will be an act of appeasement of terrorism rather than an effective means of drawing upon broader community support for the police service. Additionally, there is the very real prospect that the emasculation of the R.U.C. both in spirit and in capability will jeopardise the confidence that the people of Northern Ireland have in their future security and political stability.

It has been the success of the R.U.C. against terrorism from both extreme loyalism and republicanism which has protected the fabric of society in Northern Ireland and prevented degeneration into chaos. The bestowing of the George Cross to the R.U.C. and the many other honours to individual officers over the years and now to myself has been a very welcome and much appreciated recognition of the R.U.C., and the very real contribution that the force has made to enduring years of violence and creating the circumstances in which political dialogue became the sensible and practical alternative to violence.

But the real honour that we seek is that our proud name, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, should endure. The name and our badge, symbolising as it does an embracing of both traditions rather than disowning them we recommend strongly that they should be retained.

Please do not ignore either the wishes of serving officers and the wider police family or of the many people from all walks of life who have signed our petition.

Yours sincerely

L. Rodgers

L RODGERS
CHAIRMAN

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