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From the Bishop of Ardagh + Clonmacnois

13th October, 1980

The Right Honourable Humphrey Atkins, M. P.,
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland,
Stormont Castle,
BELFAST. BT4 3ST

Dear Secretary of State,

I hope that you will pardon me for writing to express to you my grave concern at the news of the prospect of a hunger strike on the part of some of the protesting prisoners in the "H-Blocks" in the Maze prison. This would represent a very serious deterioration in the prison situation, and indeed in the general situation in the community. A hunger strike can be expected to produce far-reaching and highly adverse repercussions in considerable sectors of the community. Once a strike of this kind is entered upon, it is extremely difficult to have it called off before it reaches a tragic end. I realise fully the immense difficulties and complexities of the situation. I am concerned only that the situation will become still more difficult and still more complex if a hunger strike is launched. My present letter is intended to be nothing more and nothing less than a cri de coeur, in the anxious hope that something might still be able to be done towards a solution. I fully realise and accept that any solution would have to be without compromise of principle on the part of the civil authorities. I have always felt that more concessions could be made within the context of over-all reform of prisoners' conditions, in line with the widely accepted principles of progressive modern penology.

I feel sure that you will accept the depth of my concern at the prospect of this new development, and the sincerity of my longing that this threat might be able to be averted.

May I be allowed to offer my sincere wishes for the success of your efforts at reconciliation and just settlement of the very difficult problems with which you are faced?

With kind personal wishes,

I am,

Yours sincerely,

+ Cahal B. Daly

