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ARCHBISHOP O FIAICH'S VISIT TO MAZE

A. Background

1. On 30 July Archbishop O Fiaich paid a pastoral visit lasting some 11 hours to Maze. The main points of his subsequent press statement were:

- (a) the Holy See was very concerned with the situation in the prison and he intended to provide them with a report.
- (b) he described conditions in the protesters' blocks as unfit for animals.
- (c) he said that there was no furniture in the cells; that prisoners could wear only a towel or a blanket and were required to sleep on mattresses on the floor; that they were allowed no writing or reading materials and no leisure activities.
- (d) he did not think that refusal to wear prison uniform should entail loss of physical exercise, association or contact outside. These were not privileges, but basic needs.
- (e) numerous allegations of ill-treatment were made to him, but he was not able to verify these.
- (f) morale was high.
- (g) the prisoners were not ordinary criminals, but convicted in special courts, often by use of dubious confessions.

B. NIO Reaction to Statement

2. On 1 August the NIO issued a press statement (Flag A: Report in Times) countering the Archbishop's allegations and making the principal point that the Archbishop had failed to recognise that the prisoners' conditions were entirely of their own making.

3. PS/Secretary of State wrote that day to Cardinal Hume and Archbishop Heim enclosing a copy of the NIO statement and of the memorandum on the Maze protest which is sent to Members of Parliament.

C. Reaction of Roman Catholic Leaders

4. Archbishop Heim spoke to Mr Jones on 2 August (Flag B). He agreed entirely with the Secretary of State and had twice informed the Vatican of the true state of affairs at Maze, emphasising that the fault was the prisoners' own. Archbishop Heim had consistently advised the Vatican not to intervene.

5. Cardinal Hume's Vicar General replied to PS/Secretary of State saying that he was "sure that the Hierarchy of this country is fully aware of the position in the Maze Prison."

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6. The British Minister at the Holy See called on the Vatican's Deputy "Foreign Minister" on 3 August. Photographs of Maze were handed over. Vatican officials were impressed by these, but queried whether any concessions to the protesters were possible. They asked what the Church might do, and were requested to ensure that the Holy See combined to condemn violence. The British Minister's conclusion was that the Vatican was "slightly cautious" but had "a clear understanding of the situation".

7. The death of Pope Paul later in the first week of August has meant that nothing further has been heard of the Holy See's reaction to Archbishop O Fiaich's Report. It is not known whether Pope John Paul I or Pope John Paul II has seen the Report, or whether any future reaction can be expected from the Vatican.

D. Points to Make

1. The Government is very grateful to Archbishop Heim for his efforts to inform the Holy See of the true situation at Maze, and hopes that the Archbishop will continue this work.

2. Archbishop O Fiaich's statement was inaccurate and gave a distorted picture of what is happening at Maze Prison. His words were turned to propaganda advantage by PIRA. The prisoners are entirely responsible for their own conditions.

3. The Secretary of State may wish to ask the Archbishop what status O Fiaich's Report to the Holy See will now have, and whether the present Pope is likely to react to it in due course.

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