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*cc. Mr Sullivan
1.10.86*

SS 1/10

Michael McAtamney Esq CBE LLB
Deputy Chief Constable
RUC Headquarters
Brooklyn
Knock Road
BELFAST
BT5 6LE

1 October 1986

Dear Michael,

IRISH LANGUAGE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

As you may be aware the British and Irish Governments have been pursuing ways of granting greater recognition to the use of the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

As part of this process it has been suggested that officials in the NIO and NI Departments be authorised to accept the use of the Irish version of names and addresses by individuals with whom they have dealings. However where such dealings involve official documents it has been recognised that for legal purposes it would be necessary for the English version to continue to be the authoritative form, and to appear alongside the Irish one. Those issuing the documents would therefore be responsible for providing an English equivalent, and indeed work is already in hand to produce a directory of Irish place names and their English equivalents. The NIO and the Northern Ireland Departments do not see any insuperable difficulties with this proposal.

I have now been asked to establish whether it would be feasible for the RUC and the Army to adopt a similar policy, particularly in regard to personal names, and whether there would be legal difficulties in allowing the Irish version to appear alongside the authoritative English form, on official documents with which you deal. You might consider that there would be serious practical difficulties - such as establishing beyond doubt the identity of individuals stopped for questioning - if people had a right to give their names and addresses in Irish, leaving the onus on the police (or Army) to provide or discover the English equivalent. At the moment I understand that individual officers may exercise their discretion to accept Irish names and addresses.

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I should therefore be grateful if you - and Robin Buchanan-Dunlop to whom I am sending a copy of this letter - could let me have your views on the subject. It would be particularly helpful if you could say in what circumstances you would be willing for persons having dealings with the police (or the Armed Forces) to use the Irish form of their names and addresses, whether as of right or depending on the discretion of the police officer or soldier concerned.

I have been tasked to submit at least a preliminary response within a week, so I should in turn be grateful if you and Robin Buchanan-Dunlop could let me have your initial reactions as soon as possible: I quite understand that it will take longer to prepare a considered response.

Yours sincerely,

Brian

B A BLACKWELL
Law and Order Division

cc Col R D Buchanan-Dunlop OBE
Chief of Staff, HQNI

Hidden copies:

Mr Chesterton
✓ Mr Spence
Miss Elliott

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