

LH/532

E. R.

BY FAX - DESK IMMEDIATE

CC A Bearpark (No 10)
R Dixon (FCO)

Mr S Cowper-Coles
British Embassy
WASHINGTON

CONGRESSMAN JOSEPH KENNEDY

I attach a letter from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to Congressman Joseph Kennedy and should be grateful if you would arrange for its onward transmission to Congressman Kennedy before he leaves for his visit to Ireland. Perhaps you would also arrange for copies to be issued to the other signatories of the message to the Prime Minister.

M. Patterson

M PATTERSON
Private Secretary

| April 1988

Mrs Hutchinson

Hidden copies:

- PS/Sot S (BTL)*
- PS/Mr Stanley (BTL)*
- PS/Dr. Mawhoodney (BTL)*
- Mr Burns*
- Mr Stephens*
- Mr Fell*
- Mr. Canell DED*
- Mr Gowdy DED*
- Mr Innes*
- Mr. Canill DED*
- Mr Shannon*
- Mr Kirk*
- Mr Hewitt*
- Mr. J. Mc Connell*
- Mr. N. Hamilton - Govt Sec*
- Mr. George RTD-FCO*
- Mr. Fugson - NAD-FCO*

8/4

MMcC



Secretary of State

Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast BT4 3ST

LETTER TO CONGRESSMAN JOSEPH P KENNEDY
FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

31 March 1988

Thank you for your St Patrick's Day letter to the Prime Minister. We met, as you will remember, at the Friends of Ireland lunch in Washington last September, and because of that and my Cabinet responsibility for Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister has asked me to reply.

I should like, first, to reaffirm the absolute commitment of the Government of the United Kingdom to the Anglo-Irish Agreement which we signed with the Republic of Ireland in November 1985. The Prime Minister and I continue to believe that the Agreement holds immense value for all the people of Northern Ireland: it addresses the central problems of the region, and makes a great and honourable contribution to resolving them. Not least it provides the Government of the Republic with a regular and effective instrument by which they can put forward views and proposals about the North, a contribution we greatly value. The recent serious incidents which you mention - and especially the particularly terrible outrages which have occurred in the Milltown Cemetery and in Andersonstown, which have done so much to increase tension since you wrote, - have shown the need for the Agreement, culminating in the positive and constructive meeting of the Inter-governmental Conference that Brian Lenihan and I jointly chaired on 25 March.

It is inevitable that we will have our differences, though nobody could have foreseen the way in which in the first months of this year so many dire and tragic issues have followed so fast upon each other.



The most important thing is that we now have a mechanism for discussing difficulties and, as far as can be, resolving them and, as a direct result, we have been able to discuss the problems in a frank, straightforward way and agreed to work together to tackle future issues. As you may be aware, we also agreed at the last meeting to hold further meetings of the Conference, beginning shortly after Easter, to address the full range of issues covered by the Agreement, including effective new legislation on fair employment.

These discussions will be the more valuable since we share the concern over the inequality of employment opportunity between the two communities in Northern Ireland. The Government is absolutely committed to improving the prospects of everybody who lives there and the fair employment proposals which I announced at the beginning of this month - and which the Irish Government have welcomed as significant and positive steps in the effort to bring about change - will have a crucial role to play in this. We will be asking Parliament to put them into law at the earliest opportunity. I was frankly very surprised that you referred to our proposals as 'empty rhetoric'. That is certainly not the way that they are perceived by many others who feel their interests are threatened and whose criticism of them are virulent. These criticisms we are determined to resist because of our commitment to fair employment. Our proposals represent clear and specific remedies for the problem, which we are determined to make succeed. Employers are already recommended to adopt goals and timetables designed to ensure that Roman Catholics and Protestants have fully equal opportunities in the recruitment process. Where there is evidence that full equality of opportunity is not being afforded, the new Fair Employment Commission will be empowered to issue legally enforceable directives. There will be tough sanctions to back up the new legislation.

I hope that these points will be helpful to you. I understand that you plan to visit Northern Ireland soon. You will be very welcome here but unfortunately I myself will be away on a brief holiday. I hope that it will be possible for you to meet one



of my Ministerial colleagues during your stay, and I understand that this is now being arranged.

I am also sending a copy of this letter to those colleagues who joined with you in the letter to the Prime Minister.