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STATEMENT BY THE CHIEF CONSTABLE, SIR HUGH ANNESLEY, AT A NEWS CONFERENCE AT RUC HEADQUARTERS WEDNESDAY, 8 SEPTEMBER 1993

Ladies and Gentlemen,
I should like this morning to discuss the general security situation in Northern Ireland and, in particular, to address concerns which have been expressed about the situation in Belfast.

My colleagues and I are very much aware of the suffering and distress which has been caused by the recent murders in Belfast, the explosions at Derrriagh and Armagh, and all the other deplorable incidents of violence. All these outrages demonstrate, yet again, that republican and loyalist terrorists are the common enemy of the decent people of Northern Ireland.

So far this year there have been 45 deaths, 16 fewer than at the same time last year. Of those 45 deaths, 26 are attributable to loyalist terrorists and 19 to republican terrorists. To date this year, there have been 172 bomb incidents, 54 fewer than in the same period last year. Republican terrorists were responsible for 142 incidents (83%), and loyalist terrorists for 30 incidents (17%).

Up to the present, the security forces have seized 130 firearms, some 10,000 rounds of ammunition and approximately 32,500 lbs of explosives and bomb-making materials. That is a substantial achievement which represents lives saved and massive destruction prevented.

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On top of that, the Police have charged 259 persons with terrorist-type offences. Of these, 166 are loyalists, and 93 republicans. Without going into detail, for legal reasons, I can say in respect of both republican and loyalist terror groups, a series of significant arrests have been made and a considerable number of murder and bombing missions intercepted and prevented. As a consequence, more lives were saved and intended devastation frustrated.

I understand that the successes of the security forces are of little comfort to those who have suffered bereavement or the loss of home or business but it is right, nonetheless, that the public should realise the scale of our efforts in protecting the community as a whole.

I also believe it proper to say this. The people of Northern Ireland, of all persuasions, have good reason to be grateful to the police and the army for their achievements and I wish to state publicly my appreciation of the outstanding work of police officers and soldiers throughout the Province. Such work, it has to be said, carried out at the intolerable cost of 9 members of the security forces being murdered and many others grievously injured.

Turning now to Belfast where 19 murders have occurred this year. Of these, 15 are attributable to loyalists and 4 to republicans. In the same period last year, the total was 24 (16 attributable to loyalists, 8 to republicans). The RUC is well aware of the fear this has generated and of the necessity to take every possible measure to counter the incidence of murder and bombing. Some of the most significant arrests, to which I referred earlier, have been made in the Belfast area - among them gangs intercepted on their way to commit murder. Every possible measure, both overt and covert, is being taken.

I wish categorically to refute the suggestion that there is not the same will or effort on the part of the RUC when it comes to dealing with loyalist terrorism. I state emphatically that this accusation is neither accurate nor fair. The proof of our impartiality and professionalism lies in the facts: the arrests which have been made, the charges which have been preferred, and in our absolute determination to counter all terrorism without fear or favour. It is unacceptable that public confidence in our integrity should be so unjustifiably undermined.

This naturally brings me to the whole question of community support. I have told you what we are doing and I believe it is creditable. I cannot emphasise sufficiently how crucial it is that the RUC should have the practical and moral support of the public. The threat from loyalist and republican terrorists remains very serious. Both are intent on further murder and destruction. In this situation, the public is not impotent. It is vital that the community should resoundingly tell the terrorists that continuing violence is intolerable, that neither set of murderers has a mandate to kill in the name of either the Protestant or Catholic community. In both communities, there are terrorists meeting and plotting outrages, using cars and houses, moving about and acting suspiciously in various ways. The community has eyes and ears. Use those eyes and ears to save life. Be vigilant and tell us what you see and hear. Defeating terrorism is not the responsibility of the police and the army alone. It is the responsibility of everyone in this Province.