



Mr M Maxwell

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NORTHERN IRELAND  
Information Service

*Mr Maxwell*

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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND SIR PATRICK  
MAYHEW QC MP

This has been a dreadful and tragic event. A terrible accident which has left 29 people dead.

I first wish to express my deepest condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives. The individuals concerned were very dedicated people engaged in vital work in Northern Ireland. I also wish to express my gratitude for the very many messages of sympathy we have received. HM The Queen has sent the following message; -

I was deeply shocked to hear of the tragedy in Scotland in which so many died. My heartfelt sympathy goes to the families and comrades of the victims. They will indeed be grievously missed.

The Prime Minister has sent me a personal message in the following terms; -

The loss of so many outstanding and dedicated people in the helicopter tragedy yesterday evening is dreadful news. I would like, through you and Malcolm Rifkind, to express my sorrow and deep sympathy to their families. Their grief will be shared through Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and their loss will be heavily felt by all friends and colleagues.

These officers and officials from the RUC, the Army, the RAF, the Northern Ireland Office and other Departments were all, in their different ways, carrying out work of vital importance to Northern Ireland. As I know from meetings during my visits to the Province, they made light of the risks in their daily lives. Their skill and determination had helped to save many lives in Northern Ireland. They should be remembered with pride as people who were working to make the community safer.

There can be no better memorial than for others to follow their example and to carry on their fine work, as I know they will.

The passengers on board the helicopter comprised 10 senior members of the RUC and 9 Army staff officers of various ranks engaged on counter-terrorism activities, together with 6 civilian security specialists working in the NIO. The 4 RAF crew members also tragically died. They were en route to a conference in Scotland concerned with the fight against terrorism throughout the United Kingdom. We shall not be releasing the names of all of those who died for reasons which I think will be obvious.

They were travelling in an RAF Chinook helicopter, an aircraft which has a long-established reputation as a safe and secure means of transport, widely used in Northern Ireland. The aircraft had recently undergone refurbishment and modernisation by Boeing. There is no evidence of sabotage. This use of a single helicopter represented no departure from standard practice. There will be three separate inquiries held into the accident. These will be undertaken by the AAIB (Air Accidents Investigation Branch) of the DTR, the Strathclyde Police and the RAF on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. We shall of course be considering carefully whether there are lessons to be learnt from this tragic accident.

I have already referred to the grievous loss this accident has inflicted on the families. It has also been a severe blow to our efforts to combat terrorism but the operational effects will certainly be overcome: the work of these fine people will continue as they would have wished and indeed is continuing even now.