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File

cc Mr Watkins
Mr Ritchie
Mr Carson

M 13/3

**From: J A Canavan
CCRU**

13 March 1997

To: PS/Michael Ancram

PEACE PEOPLE - REQUEST FOR A MEETING

1. Mairead Maguire (formerly Corrigan) of the Peace People, wrote to the Secretary of State on 26 February requesting a meeting with him or a Ministerial colleague to discuss the need for replacement funding following the decision of the Community Relations Council to cease core-funding. In a separate letter the Chairperson of the Peace People has also written to me requesting a meeting.

Background

2. The Peace People organisation was established in 1976 by Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, following the tragic deaths of Ms Corrigan's sister's children in a terrorist related incident. At first, its emphasis was on holding rallies to demonstrate the abhorrence of the vast majority of the people in Northern Ireland for the continuing violence. These attained world-wide media attention but had little long-term effect on Northern Ireland opinion. Later the aims of the group were widened to include:
 - i. acting as a reconciliation group and promoting greater cross-community understanding through various projects which the Peace People undertake in connection with the improvement of community relations;
 - ii. providing a welfare service to help people break out of the cycle of violence and fear (working largely with prisoners' families);

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- iii. acting as a forum for debate; and
- iv. running "Youth for Peace" an independent youth group which provides an opportunity for young people to work together to create a better future.

The history of the Peace People has, however, been characterised by internal dissension and personality clashes. In the 1980s its profile was much reduced and newer groups played a more active role in community relations and peace promotion.

3. Since 1994 full policy and executive responsibility for the direct funding of most community relations activities has lain with the Community Relations Council. In 1997/98 the Council will receive over £2.5m from Government to enable it to undertake its main functions of promoting community relations, awareness of cultural diversity and the resolution of conflict. Within this budget over £1.1m is allocated towards the core-funding of a wide range of community relations and cultural traditions bodies. The offer of core-funding grant-aid is at the discretion of the Council and whilst careful consideration is given to each application it is not always possible to assist applications to the extent requested, or at all, even if applications meet the criteria. As with Government Departments, it is a matter of prioritising and seeking best value for money within available resources.
4. CCRU initially, in the early nineties, provided funding towards the Peace People's core costs but since 1994 this function has resided with the Community Relations Council. Lately however the Council became concerned about the community relations focus and impact of the Peace People's activities. The main thrust of their current proposal is the development of an Alternative to Violence Programme. The Community Relations Council analysis is that this work is not new, does not fill a gap in existing provision and they would have concerns as to whether it would attract sufficient interest. The other elements in the application relate to the establishment of the Ormeau Community Festival; the formation of a peace network; and a "gun free" campaign.

5. The Peace People were informed by letter of the decision to cease core-funding by the Community Relations Council on 19 February. As the responsibility for decision-making in this case lies with the Council, CCRU would not wish to intervene in the relationship between the Council and the Peace People. To do so would undermine the position and credibility of the Council and its staff. The Peace People's representations should therefore be raised in the first instance with the Council and only when this avenue is fully exhausted should CCRU or Ministers become involved.

6. This decision does not affect the separate core-funding of £24k received by the Peace People from CRC for their Farm Project at Coleraine and this will continue in 1997/98.

Recommendation

7. Our advice is that it would be inappropriate for the Secretary of State and his Ministerial colleagues to become involved in the issue at this stage. We would suggest instead that the Peace People take up the issue directly with the Chairman of the Community Relations Council, Jonathan Bardon, and raise with him the rejection of their application in more detail together with any other relevant concerns. CCRU has discussed the matter with Mr Bardon and he would be prepared to meet Mrs Maguire to explain the position. However, it seems doubtful that the Council will be prepared to do more than offering advice.
8. I have attached a draft reply which:
- i. explains that it would be inappropriate for the Secretary of State or one of his Ministerial colleagues to become involved, certainly at this stage;
 - ii. suggests a meeting with the Chairman of the Community Relations Council to clarify the position; and

- iii. leaves open the possibility of a subsequent meeting with me but makes it clear that CCRU does not provide an alternative avenue for core-funding community relations organisation, if an approach to CRC fails.

[Signed: JAC]

J A CANAVAN

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DRAFT

Ms Mairead Maguire
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You wrote to Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP on 26 February requesting a meeting with the Secretary of State or one of his Ministerial colleagues to discuss the need for replacement funding following the decision of the Community Relations Council to cease core-funding.

Sir Patrick has seen your letter and has asked me to reply. Since April 1994 the prime decision-making role in relation to the provision of core-funding grant to community relations and cultural traditions bodies has lain with the Community Relations Council. I am sure that you would appreciate that in consequence it would be inappropriate for the Secretary of State or any other Minister to become involved in individual cases until such time as the issues in question had been fully explored with the Community Relations Council.

The Council is an independent body which was established to develop community relations activities at local level and to promote constructive debate about the various issues which divide the Northern Ireland community. Core-funding of community relations work is primarily the responsibility of the Council, not the Central Community Relations Unit.

I would suggest therefore that you should seek a meeting with the Chairman of the Council, Mr Jonathan Bardon, to discuss the rejection of your application. Mr Bardon is aware of your representations and will explain the Council's position on the matter. However, no guarantee can be given that the outcome will be successful, particularly having regard to competing pressures and increasing constraints on resources.

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As you are probably aware, Mrs Hart, your Chairperson, wrote to Tony Canavan of the Central Community Relations Unit on the same issue. CCRU would not normally act as an alternative avenue for financial support should an application to the Community Relations Council fail. If, after meeting the Chairman of the Council, officials of your organisation still wish to meet Mr Canavan, he would be happy to accede to your request.

PS/Secretary of State

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