

Sectarianism in Sport
file.

An Roinn Cultúir, Ealaíon agus Fóillíochta
Máinnystrie o Fowkgates, Airts and Aisedom

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SUB248/2002

Neil Lennon Esq
Celtic Football Club
Celtic Park
GLASGOW
G40 3RE
Scotland

4th September 2002

Dear Neil,

I have just returned to the office today but during my absence, I followed closely the events in Northern Ireland which surrounded your decision to retire from international football.

When I first heard the news that someone should make such a threat against a sportsman, I was absolutely appalled. Just as there is no place in society for anyone who threatens the life of an individual, neither is there a place in sport for people who single out a player for abuse because of his religion or the club he plays for.

I condemn totally the actions of those who do so and have already called on anyone with any knowledge of the source of the threat issued against you to pass the information to the Police immediately. There must be no hiding place for these people.

Last year, you displayed remarkable courage when you decided to continue playing for Northern Ireland after that disgraceful episode at Windsor Park and, after this latest outrage, I respect and appreciate fully your reasons for now deciding to bow out of international football. Most people in the position in which you found yourself that day would have done the same. Captaining your country for the first time would have been a very proud and memorable occasion for you and an honour which would have been fully merited.

I do hope that the response and messages of support which you received from the vast majority of the general public and the real football supporters here will have been of some comfort to you and your family. I know that the door to international football has been left

from the Minister
Michael McGimpsey MLA

open for you. If your circumstances change and you feel able to return, we will all be delighted to welcome you back.

I thank you for representing our country with distinction and wish you continued success in your career.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Michael McGimpsey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

MICHAEL McGIMPSEY MLA
Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure