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PS/SCS Bal
 PS/HR Murphy DFP Bal
 PS/PUS Bal
 PS/HR Supt
 MR Lister
 MR Ferguson
 MR Leach
 MR Schultze
 MR Moller
 MR Lash
 MR T. Smith

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
 11 MILLBANK
 LONDON
 SW1P 4QE

D.F.P. 11
 -9 FEB 1999
 PM 363/99
 PS/Reporter
 First Minister

16.1
 Mr. Angus

Miss Baxter
 I seem to
 recall that
 this raised
 this issue.
 These documents

SECRETARY OF STATE
 FOR
 NORTHERN IRELAND

David Trimble
 First Minister (Designate)
 Parliament Buildings
 Stormont
 BELFAST
 BT4 3XX

16.2

Dear David,

February 1999

PC/694/99
 09 FEB 1999
 RECEIVED

Mr. Hughes
 Mr. Carr
 for information
 A Boss
 9/2/99

FLYING OF FLAGS

The Good Friday Agreement (p 20, para 5) states:

"All participants acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need in particular in creating the new institutions to ensure that such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division. Arrangements will be made to monitor this issue and consider what action might be required."

This is an enjoiner on all those who took part in negotiation of the Agreement, including the British Government, and I believe that I therefore have a responsibility to consider our stance in a number of areas, primarily the current practice in relation to flying of the Union Flag on government buildings.

Flag-flying is not based on statute. We take our cue from days specified by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on command of the Queen. In Northern Ireland, however, five locally specified days are added to the DCMS list - New Year's, St Patrick's Easter, 12 July and Christmas Days; this practice arose from decisions by Stormont in the 1920s and 1930s.



I now intend to deschedule the five extra days on which the Union flag is flown on Government buildings, placing practice in Northern Ireland on the same basis as in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Chief Constable of the RUC has already announced that he is taking this action in relation to police stations, bringing the RUC into line with police forces in the rest of the UK.

That would remain the practice of the NIO post-devolution. The new Northern Ireland administration would, of course, be free to make its own decisions about flag-flying after devolution.

A related issue is that of gun salutes at Stormont. These take place five times each year, to mark the Queen's Accession and Coronation, and the birthdays of the Queen and the Queen Mother. My officials are currently examining the feasibility of an alternative location, so that the gun salutes are no longer held at Stormont, and I will write to you again when that work is further advanced.

I would welcome your views on any of these issues, and indeed would be happy to consider any alternatives which you might wish to put to me, following agreement with the Deputy First Minister (Designate) to whom I am copying this letter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marjorie'.

MARJORIE MOWLAM