

Mr Daly 29/12

RECEIVED

29 DEC 2003

MD

**The Office of the First Minister
and Deputy First Minister**

Machinery of Government Division

Stormont Castle, Stormont Estate, Belfast BT4 3TT

Tel: 028 9037 8216 e-mail john.murphy@ofmdfmini.gov.uk Fax: 028 9037 8221

From: John Murphy

19 December 2003

Mr Ginn 30/12/03.

Copy distribution below

Secretary of State (B&L)

**SOS653/2003: FAILURE TO OBSERVE THE PERIOD OF SILENCE ON
ARMISTICE DAY**

Issue: Responding to concerns from Jeffrey Donaldson MP about the observance of a period of silence on Armistice Day in the NIO and NI Departments.

Timing: Routine.

Presentational Issues: There is unlikely to be media interest in this issue.

Recommendation: That you respond along the lines of the attached draft.

Detail

Jeffrey Donaldson MP wrote to you on 18 November with regard to the failure to observe the period of silence as part of the Act of Remembrance at 11am on Tuesday 11 November this year. He had been contacted by a number of civil servants employed in the NIO and NI Departments who indicated that it had been normal practice in the past to observe the Two Minute Silence on that day. Mr Donaldson asks whether this is a change in policy, given his understanding that this is the practice in other parts of the UK.

2. In November 1998, central guidance was issued to all NI Departments and the NIO on the observance of the Two Minute Silence at 11am on 11 November. This guidance was issued in the context of a Royal British Legion campaign on the 80th anniversary of the Armistice that a two minute silence should be observed on 11 November. It reiterated the line from 10 Downing Street that the Government would maintain its efforts to ensure that Remembrance Sunday and the Two Minute Silence were observed in tandem, with full dignity, respect and honour. The statement also confirmed that the observance of the Two Minute Silence on Remembrance Day or at another time was a personal decision and that individuals should not be prevented from doing so if they so wished. There was no direction that all Government offices had to observe the period of silence.

3. Remembrance Day is officially commemorated by the NICS in a Service of Remembrance held in Parliament Buildings to which all civil servants are invited. There has been no subsequent reiteration of the advice issued in 1998, although a formal two minute silence was observed by Departments in 2001 as a mark of respect for those who died in the 9/11 attacks.

Recommendation

4. There is no change in the broad policy to fully respect the rights of anyone who wishes to observe the Two Minutes Silence on 11 November although this clearly falls short of the presumption in Mr Donaldson's letter that there is a corporate collective observance. However, to address the concerns conveyed by Mr Donaldson arrangements can be made to ensure that central guidance^{*} is issued to all NI Departments in early November 2004 on the lines of that provided in 1998. I understand the Northern Ireland Office will ensure that a similar message issues to its staff at the same time. Accordingly, it is recommended that you reply to Jeffrey Donaldson on this basis. A draft is attached for your consideration.

John Murphy

Ext 88216

** not CPA - per M.D.*

Distribution

PS Secretary of State (B&L)

Jane Kennedy (B&L)

John Spellar (B&L)

Ian Pearson (B&L)

Joe Pilling (B&L)

Nigel Hamilton

Rosalie Flanagan

David Watkins

Neill Jackson

Linda Brown

Mary Madden

Robert Hannigan

John McKervill

Simon Marsh

DRAFT FOR SIGNATURE BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Jeffrey Donaldson MP
2 Sackville Street
Wallace Avenue
LISBURN
BT27 4AB

December 2003

Thank you for your letter of 18 November concerning the observance of the Two Minute Silence on 11 November by civil servants in Northern Ireland.

Armistice Day is formally observed by the NICS by means of a Service of Remembrance held in Parliament Buildings on 11 November. An open invitation to attend is issued annually by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service to all staff in the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office. In addition civil servants are free to observe a personal Act of Remembrance on Armistice Day. Specific guidance issued to Departments in 1998 in the context of the Royal British Legion's wish to have the 80th anniversary of the Armistice marked by a formal Two Minute Silence, acknowledged that it is a personal decision whether to observe the Two Minute Silence on Remembrance Day or at another time and that the rights of those who wish to do so should be fully respected. It also confirmed the Government's commitment to maintaining its efforts to ensure that Remembrance Sunday and the Two Minute Silence are observed in tandem, with full dignity, respect and honour.

This remains the position, but in view of the concerns which you have conveyed to me, I have asked that arrangements are put in place to ensure that guidance is reissued to the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office in advance of Armistice Day next year.

Paul Murphy
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland