



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

16 July, 1980

Original - AR.
After
Ireland. BK
CMFO

Dear Mr. Naguib,

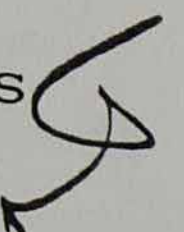
You wrote to me on 24 June about a letter you had received from Michael Alison, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, in reply to your letter of 28 May with which you had enclosed a statement from relatives of protesting prisoners in Armagh Prison.

The Minister intended no discourtesy in pointing out that the allegations contained in the statement had been refuted on numerous previous occasions. In returning the statement he was following a common practice of sending back any enclosure with a Member's letter, after taking a copy of it.

Like the Minister, however, I do understand the anxiety of the parents and relatives who are exposed to the propaganda campaign which misrepresents the true position in the Maze and Armagh prisons. I can only say that I am fully satisfied that prisoners have not been denied washing and toilet facilities and that the other forms of deprivation complained of have been brought about entirely by their own actions. They have certainly not been beaten by Prison Officers, male or female.

As far as the five demands of the prisoners are concerned, you will have noted the findings of the European Commission of Human Rights that the right to seek preferential status for a certain category of prisoner is not amongst the rights guaranteed by the Convention, or by Article 9 in particular. The Commission observed

/ that the applicants



that the applicants were not entitled to the status of political prisoner under national law, or under the Convention, or under the existing norms of international law.

The Commission found that the protesters' unhygienic living conditions were self-imposed as part of their protest for special category status and, were they motivated to improve them, could be eliminated almost immediately. Although the applicants were protesting prisoners at Maze Prison, an exact parallel can be drawn with the protest in Armagh.

You also raised the question of searching prisoners who are attending religious services. I am satisfied of the need for random frisk searches to be made when the Governor considers them necessary in the interests of security, and that these searches are carried out in an impartial manner and without harassment to individuals.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

Frank Maguire, Esq., M.P.