

TEXT OF A LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

NBPA

His Eminence Cardinal Tomas O Fiaich
Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland
Ara Coeli
ARMAGH
Co Armagh

22 June 1981

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Dear Cardinal

I feel I should write to tell you how much I admired the statement which you and your colleagues made last week about the hunger strike. It is difficult to see how anyone could remain unmoved by its compassion, its urgency and its directness. I am sure that it will have been of immense help to those few people who still feel a dilemma of conscience towards political violence.

We must hope and pray that those who direct that violence, together with the hunger strikers themselves and their families, will follow your clear lead. It will be a tragedy if they fail to do so and force the minority community in Northern Ireland to suffer again as they did last month. No-one else wishes to see a renewal of rioting, injuries and deaths. West Belfast and West Londonderry have suffered enough the consequences of these misguided men's attempts to achieve by force what could be sought legitimately through peaceful persuasion.

But the next step must be for the hunger strike to end. The pointless waste of young lives, the anguish of relations and friends, the effect of the disturbances in the wider community - all this is of the keenest concern to the Government. The Government has already demonstrated its flexibility in dealing with the prison protests. It is committed to keeping the regime for all prisoners in Northern Ireland under review. We remain ready to facilitate any investigation that the European Human Rights Commission may wish to make in the course of considering the presently outstanding application or any fresh application which may be made.

At the same time, we must all look to the future, difficult though it is at this moment. Your statement speaks of injustices in the past. The Government will continue with the task of creating a just and fair society in Northern Ireland. We want to renew the search for a viable political framework in which this society can live. All these essential tasks will be hindered while the community is divided by the fear and hatred which violence brings.

My colleagues and I share your concern for the future. I hope we may have your prayers at this difficult time.

As the Conference's statement was made public, I propose to release this letter to the Press tomorrow.

Yours sincerely

HUMPHREY ATKINS