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*From the Private Secretary*

2 September 1980

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you, Mrs. Kernaghan, Mrs. Latimer and Mrs. Morrow for your letter of 9 August. She has asked me to reply on her behalf.

I can assure you that there has been no slackening whatever in the efforts of the Security Forces in the Newtownbutler area, or indeed anywhere else in Fermanagh. The Police, supported as necessary by the Army, remain dedicated to the elimination of terrorism and they are continuing to take all practicable steps towards this end. The operations of the Security Forces in the area are both real and intensive. There is a constant refinement of methods to ensure the best possible chance of deterring and arresting those who seek to carry out these terrible deeds. The efforts of the security forces have indeed been paying considerable dividends. There has been a significant reduction in terrorist activities in Fermanagh in recent weeks.

The closure of selected border roads is part of a combination of tactics used to deter cross-border terrorist activity. As you will know several further crossings in south east Fermanagh have been closed this year where security forces consider that closure will have a significant effect in hampering terrorist activity. The crossings which remain open are kept under constant review and further individual closures can be authorised as and when, in the professional judgement of the Security Forces, such action would have a genuine operational benefit. But closure of all border roads would have a most serious effect on the commercial life of Northern Ireland (as well as that of the Republic) and would also put at risk the vitally important co-operation between the forces of law and order on either side of the border. In the opinion of the Security Forces, with which the Government agrees, the disadvantages far outweigh the additional security benefit, if any, to be gained from the wholesale closure of border roads.

The effectiveness of permanently guarding open border crossings depends critically on the local circumstances. In some parts of the Province this is a useful tactic. But in places such as Fermanagh the substantial number of security force personnel who would be tied down in such an operation can, in the judgement of their operational commanders, be more effectively used in a mobile role: for instance by setting up surprise vehicle checks over a much wider area. Moreover

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it must be remembered that a permanent check point itself constitutes a target for the terrorists to attack; there have been several such attacks in the past. Nevertheless, as with the closure of border roads, the question of permanently guarding selected crossings is kept under constant review.

In conclusion the Prime Minister has asked me to say that she shares your continued deep concern at the security situation which has had such tragic consequences for each of you. There are no easy or instant solutions. But the Government is firmly pledged to bring terrorism to an end whatever the difficulties. Every possible step is being taken in the effort to ensure that all the people of Northern Ireland can once again live in peace and free from fear.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Mrs. H. Howe