

HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL TOMAS O'FIAICH,
ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH AND PRIMATE OF ALL IRELAND
ARA COELI
ARMAGH
CO. ARMAGH

17.XII.80.

1. Thank you for your telegram. I know of your deep concern not only for the hunger strikers and their families but also for the victims of the violence for which these men have been convicted.

2. I appreciate the efforts you and your episcopal colleagues have made to persuade the hunger strikers not to add to the record of violence by destroying their own lives.

3. I believe that there is now almost universal agreement, in Ireland and elsewhere, that men of violence can have no right to political status. But political status is what the protestors and hunger strikers are demanding. This the Government cannot and will not give.

4. The European Commission for Human Rights supports the Government's stand on this point. The Commission also urged the Government to keep under constant review the humanitarian aspects of the conditions in the prisons. This we are doing and, as you know, we have made a number of significant improvements in the prison regime this year. But these have had no effect on the protests.

5. You have made clear your hope that the hunger strikers will desist from their present course of action. Every day the Government

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underline their support for that plea. What is needed now is recognition by the hunger strikers that their action, if sustained, could well lead to further violence and to needless suffering for other, innocent, people. I earnestly hope that your work and prayers together with our own practical efforts, which will continue, will lead to an early resolution of the present critical situation.

Margaret Thatcher.