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10 DOWNING STREET

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From the Private Secretary

14 July, 1981.

Dear Stephen,

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The Maze Hunger Strike

When the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary called on the Prime Minister earlier today, he raised with her the question of the next steps in dealing with the Maze hunger strike. He had discussed the problem with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the course of the morning.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said matters had now come to a pass where our relations with the Republic of Ireland and with the United States were at serious risk. The Taoiseach's message of 10 July had, for instance, placed cross border security co-operation in question. It was essential that there should not be another death in the Maze, particularly not that of Kieran Doherty, without HMG having been seen to do something. It was difficult, if not impossible, for HMG itself to put forward publicly proposals designed to end the hunger strike since such proposals would inevitably lead the PIRA to ask for more. This suggested that we should take up the option of calling in the ICRC. Whether or not they came up with helpful proposals, the mere fact of having involved them would put us in a more tenable position. If we were to approach the ICRC, it was important that this should be done soon.

The Prime Minister said that she had already agreed on 3 July (Willie Rickett's letter to you of that date refers) that the ICRC could be called in if the activities of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace led nowhere. She was therefore content that the ICRC should now be approached. She agreed that this should be as soon as possible. i.e., as I have already told you on the telephone, today. The Prime Minister hopes that action can be taken with the ICRC before any other "channel" is activated.

There was also a brief discussion about force feeding, which the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary described as the only other option available to HMG at present. He wondered why, if drip feeding was not possible, we could not at least put glucose in the hunger strikers' drinking water. The Prime Minister asked for a report on this, making the point that at the very least an effort should be made to prevent the death of any hunger striker

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before the ICRC had had a chance to report. I should be grateful if you could let me have a note as soon as possible.

We should aim to despatch the Prime Minister's reply to the Taoiseach's message of 10 July as soon as possible. The draft enclosed with Mike Hopkins' letter to me of 13 July has not yet been submitted to the Prime Minister. It will, of course, have to be amended to take account of the decision about the ICRC recorded above.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Halliday (Home Office), Roderic Lyne (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Michael Arthur (Lord Privy Seal's Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely

Michael Alexander

S.W. Boys-Smith, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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