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FM HOLY SEE

101600Z DEC 80

TO PRIORITY FCO
TELNO 49 OF 10 DECEMBER 1980
INFO ROUTINE ROME.

THE PROTESTING MAZE PRISONERS

1. WHEN I SAW MONSIGNOR SILVESTRINI THIS MORNING WE SPOKE ABOUT THE PROTESTERS IN THE MAZE PRISON. HE SAID THAT IF ONE OF THE PRISONERS WERE TO DIE THE VATICAN WOULD BE PLACED IN A DIFFICULT POSITION. THEY THEREFORE CONTINUED TO HOPE THAT SOME CONCESSION BY THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES ON CONDITIONS IN THE PRISON MIGHT CONTRIBUTE A SOLUTION.

2. I SAID THAT THE HUNGER STRIKE WAS UNDERTAKEN AT THE PRISONERS OWN VOLITION. A DEATH WOULD BE TANTAMOUNT TO SUICIDE. OUR POLICY WAS NOT TO FORCE FEED. NOR COULD WE MAKE ANY CONCESSION ON POLITICAL STATUS WHICH WAS WHAT THE PRISONERS WANTED. I HOPED THAT IN THE LIGHT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S TALK WITH THE POPE OUR POSITION WAS NOW UNDERSTOOD. I GAVE MGR. SILVESTRINI A COPY OF THE COLOUR BROCHURE ON THE MAZE PRISON TO ILLUSTRATE THE QUALITY OF THE FACILITIES AND THE MESS WHICH THE DIRTY PROTESTERS MADE OF THEM.

3. MGR. SILVESTRINI THEN SAID THAT THE POPE HAD TAKEN VERY CAREFUL NOTE OF WHAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD SAID TO HIM ON 24 NOVEMBER. THEIR TALK HAD BEEN MAINLY DEVOTED TO THIS SUBJECT. THE ARGUMENTS WERE CLEAR AND HE UNDERSTOOD OUR POSITION. HE NEVERTHELESS CONTINUED TO HOPE THAT WE WOULD FIND A SOLUTION.

4. I THINK THAT THIS IS AS NEAR AS WE ARE LIKELY TO COME TO A DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FROM THE POPE ON THIS ISSUE. MGR. SILVESTRINI REFERRED TO THE STATEMENTS BY THE BISHOPS AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT WE FOUND THESE HELPFUL. I SAID THAT WE DID BUT REITERATED THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A COMPROMISE ON POLITICAL STATUS.

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