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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

23 February 1983

Dear Mrs. Whitehouse

You telephoned my office on 4 February urging fresh action on obscenity legislation.

I fully understand, and indeed share, your deep concern about the decline in moral standards in this country. Like you, I deplore those who seek to make profit out of exploiting the weaknesses of others and in so doing undermine our traditional standards of decency and respect for family life.

Nevertheless I think it only fair to say that we have, during our period in office, made some progress towards controlling and restricting the trade in pornography. As you know, we introduced provisions in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 which allow local authorities to control the activities of sex establishments in their area and we have also lent support to Private Members' measures dealing with indecent displays (the Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981) and bogus cinema clubs (the Cinematograph (Amendment) Act 1982). I believe that these measures will have a significant effect in restricting the sale and exhibition of pornographic material.

There is also, I know, considerable concern about the sale and availability of objectionable video cassettes. As the Home Secretary explained to you in his letter of 7 February we are at present awaiting the report of the British Board of Film Censors/ British Videogram Association working party who have been looking at the

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whole question of controls over the sale and rental of video cassettes. I share the Home Secretary's view that it would be sensible initially to see whether an effective voluntary system of control can be established, but I can assure you that if no such system emerges we have not ruled out the possibility of legislative controls.

I appreciate, of course, that you would prefer to see comprehensive new legislation covering the whole area. As you well know, however, this is a particularly complex and controversial subject and I am sure that we have in the past been right to concentrate our efforts in areas where we can be reasonably certain of securing sufficient parliamentary support. Nevertheless, as I believe the Home Secretary has already told you, despite the difficulty of securing widely acceptable and effective legislation we do not rule out the possibility of more wide-ranging reform at some stage in the future. I hope therefore that you will continue to press your case, because such reforms could not succeed without public and Parliamentary support. I am sure that you will do so.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Whelan

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Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, C.B.E.