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FM HOLY SEE 301450Z OCT 80

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 35 OF 30 OCTOBER 1980

INFO ROME (A)

ULSTER PRISONERS:

1. I WAS SUMMONED TO THE VATICAN THIS MORNING BY MONSIGNOR SILVESTRINI TO BE HANDED THE TEXT OF THE FOLLOWING PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE POPE TO THE PRIME MINISTER.

BEGINS:

I AM RECEIVING DISTURBING NEWS ABOUT THE TENSION IN THE MAZE PRISON IN NORTHERN IRELAND, WHERE A NUMBER OF PRISONERS HAVE BEGUN A HUNGER STRIKE.

I AM AWARE THAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, MR ATKINS, HAS ALREADY BEEN ASKED TO EXAMINE THE PROBLEM AND TO SEEK POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.

IN THE SPIRIT OF THE CALL FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION WHICH I MADE AT DROGHEDA DURING MY PASTORAL VISIT TO IRELAND LAST YEAR, I WOULD EXPRESS MY DEEP CONCERN ABOUT BOTH THE TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES WHICH THE AGITATION COULD HAVE FOR THE PRISONERS THEMSELVES AND ALSO THE POSSIBLE CRAVE REPERCUSSIONS UPON THE WHOLE SITUATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

I WOULD ASK YOU TO CONSIDER PERSONALLY POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS IN ORDER TO AVOID IRREVERSIBLE CONSEQUENCES THAT COULD PERHAPS PROVE IRREPARABLE.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

ENDS:

2. I EXPLAINED THE POSITION ON POLITICAL STATUS TO MONSIGNOR SILVESTRINI. HE HAD WITH HIM A LETTER FROM ME TO MONSIGNOR TONUCCI WITH WHICH I HAD SENT THE SUBSTANCE OF FCO TELEGRAMS NUMBERS 36 TO BIS NEW YORK AND GUIDANCE NO 110. I ALSO WENT OVER THE POINTS ON CIVILIAN CLOTHES.

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3. WHEN I ASKED WHAT FURTHER PRACTICAL STEPS HE THOUGHT WE COULD TAKE IN ADDITION TO THE CONCESSION ON CLOTHING HE WAS SILENT. HE SAID THAT (I) FOR THEIR PART THE CLERGY WOULD CONTINUE TO URGE THE PRISONERS TO GIVE UP THE STRIKE AND (II) THE MESSAGE WAS A PERSONAL ONE FROM THE POPE HIMSELF.

HEATH

NORTHERN IRELAND
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PS/MR HURD
PS/MR RIDLEY
PS/MR BLAKER

PS/PUS
SIR A ACLAND
CHIEF CLERK
MR ADAMS
MR BULLARD
MR FERGUSSON
LORD N G LENNOX
MR BRAITHWAITE

ADDITIONAL DISTRIBUTION

NORTHERN IRELAND

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