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✓ ce Press Office  
Ireland

THE PRIME MINISTER'S MESSAGE FOLLOWING HER VISIT TO  
NORTHERN IRELAND TODAY:

TODAY I HAVE JUST BEEN VISITING NORTHERN IRELAND FOR MY  
CUSTOMARY CHRISTMASTIDE VISIT. WE STARTED IN BANGOR  
WITH A WALKABOUT IN THE SHOPPING CENTRE, VERY SOON WE  
WERE SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE. I WONDER WHETHER, IN THE  
WAKE OF BALLYKELLY, AND THE DAILY TRAGEDIES THAT OCCUR  
TO OUR ARMED FORCES, TO THE RUC AND TO THE ULSTER  
DEFENCE REGIMENT, WHETHER IT WOULD BE REALLY QUITE RIGHT  
TO SAY HAPPY CHRISTMAS. VERY SOON THE DECISION WAS  
TAKEN OUT OF MY HANDS AS PEOPLE CAME UP TO ME AND WISHED  
ME A HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND SAID PLEASE DON'T FORGET US.  
THAT WAS REALLY WHY I CAME TODAY AS MOST CHRISTMASSES,  
JUST TO SAY NORTHERN IRELAND IS ALWAYS IN OUR THOUGHTS  
AND IS NEVER FORGOTTEN. WE HAD A WONDERFUL WELCOME IN  
BANGOR. FROM THERE WE WENT TO THE MUSGRAVE PARK  
MILITARY HOSPITAL, VERY CONSCIOUS THAT WE WERE IN THE  
WAKE OF BALLYKELLY. WE FOUND A FEW PEOPLE THERE WHO  
HAD EXPERIENCED THAT TERRIBLE TRAGEDY. WE FOUND ALSO  
SOME OF THE ARMED FORCES WHO HAD SUFFERED WHILE ON PATROL  
IN CROSSMAGLEN AND OTHERS IN BELFAST. WE WERE VERY  
MUCH REMINDED HOW VERY MUCH WE OWE TO THE COURAGE AND  
BRAVERY OF ALL OF THOSE IN THE SECURITY FORCES WHO ARE  
TRYING TO ERADICATE TERRORISM FROM OUR LIVES. THEY  
WERE ALL WONDERFUL PEOPLE. THEY HAD ALL BEEN THROUGH  
GREAT TROUBLE, THEY HAD ALL EXPERIENCED BALLYKELLY, ALL  
BEEN UNDER FIRE OR HAD BEEN AMBUSHED OR HAD HAD THINGS  
THROWN AT THEM. THEIR MORALE WAS SUPERB. THEY ALL  
SAID, WE HAVE A JOB TO DO, AND OUR GREAT DESIRE IS TO  
GET BACK AND DO IT. THE DEVOTION OF THOSE PEOPLE AND  
THE STAFF LOOKING AFTER THEM WAS WONDERFUL TO BEHOLD.  
FROM THERE WE WENT TO BESSBROOK TO SEE HOW THE ARMED  
SERVICES ARE DOING THE WORK OF DAILY PATROLLING TO GET  
THE SECURITY THAT THEY NEED IN ORDER TO TRY TO STOP  
TERRORISM AND ERADICATE IT FROM THIS PROVINCE. THEIR  
SPIRIT, TOO, WAS MARVELLOUS. THEY HAVE A JOB TO DO  
AND THEY DO IT MAGNIFICENTLY AND WE WERE SO VERY VERY  
PLEASED TO SEE THEM IN SUCH GOOD HEART. AND THEN AGAIN  
ON TO ARMAGH WHERE WE VISITED THE RUC. EVERY PERSON I  
SPOKE TO HAS HAD SOME TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE HAPPENED TO  
HIM OR HIS FAMILY, AND I ALSO SAW THREE WIDOWS. THEIR  
DETERMINATION TO FIGHT TERRORISM IS ABSOLUTE.

IT IS OF COURSE THE SEASON OF PEACE AND GOODWILL.  
THE ARMED FORCES, THE SECURITY SERVICES, WILL DO THEIR  
BEST TO FIGHT THOSE FORCES OF DARKNESS. ONLY WE  
IN THIS SEASON CAN ONCE AGAIN TRY TO LEARN TO LIVE  
TOGETHER BECAUSE FIGHTING FOR PEACE, FREEDOM AND JUSTICE  
MEANS THAT WE ARE FREE TO LIVE TOGETHER IN THE WAY WE  
CHOOSE.

MAY I WISH YOU ALL A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS, AND WISH  
US ALL A GOOD NEW YEAR IN WHICH WE MAY ONCE AGAIN  
STRIVE FOR THE THINGS THAT MATTER SO MUCH TO THE FUTURE  
OF OUR FAMILIES AND OUR COUNTRY.

++++++ENDS++++++

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