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THE PRIME MINISTER

15 February 1988

Dear Mr. McCarthy,

Thank you very much for your further letter of
25 January about your son, John.

I was very distressed to learn about your illness and
send you my heartfelt sympathy. I realise how devastating
John's situation is for you and your family and of course
understand that serious worries about your health can only
add to the pressures that you all face.

You refer to rumours that the hostages will not be
released until next November. We too have seen these
rumours; I can only say that we have no reason to believe
them. There are many stories about the hostages but very few
of them are true. I would not worry too much about this one.

On the question of our policies, I can assure you that
we try hard not to make any official pronouncements on the
hostages unless it is absolutely necessary - for precisely
the considerations you have outlined. I am grateful for your
understanding of the reasons for our policies. The important
thing is to get the hostages out, and to prevent more
innocent people from being taken: these two points are what
we concentrate on. It is difficult and frustrating, but we
see no other way.

I know your husband is in regular contact with officials in the Foreign Office, and they will always be pleased to discuss John's case with you or him, and to give you such information as they can. In broad terms, I can assure you that we have used every channel and spoken to every possible intermediary where it has seemed to us that this might help John, and not give rise to absurd demands which we could not meet and which still might not result in his release. We will continue on this course.

Please do not hesitate to write to me again. I am taking a personal interest in John's case, and can understand at least something of what you are going through. I hope that you will be given strength to work and wait for the happy result we all want.

Every good wish.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Thatcher

Mrs Sheila McCarthy.