



File
cc: MO

JG

Ireland

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

13 April 1981

Dear Cardinal O'Fiaich,

You wrote to me on 3 April expressing your concern about the health of Miss Dolours Price, who is in Armagh Prison.

It is true that in recent weeks this prisoner's health has been giving increasing cause for concern. However, she has been receiving the closest possible medical attention; she has been seen by two consultant psychiatrists, and twice during the last few days by a consultant physician. I am informed that early next week she is likely to be transferred to a health service hospital as a precaution so that the level of medical surveillance can be improved still further.

The various points which you make on Miss Price's behalf have been carefully and sympathetically considered, but I am afraid that the Secretary of State remains of the view that he would not be justified, on present information, in directing her release from the life sentence and in remitting the balance of the fixed sentence of twenty years by the use of the Royal Prerogative. You may be assured, however, that both the Secretary of State and the Minister of State directly responsible for prison matters, Mr. Alison, are taking a personal interest in the case and that they both see up-to-date medical reports from time to time.

/ I do entirely

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I do entirely understand the anxiety which Miss Price's condition must be causing to her family. In this connection I should perhaps mention that approval has been given for a consultant nominated by the solicitor acting for the family to examine her for the purpose of providing them with a report on her condition.

I am sorry that I have to send you a reply which I know you will find disappointing, but as I have said Miss Price's condition will continue to be very closely watched.

Yours sincerely,

(sgd)

MT

His Eminence Cardinal Tomas O Fiaich

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

10 April 1981

Type for signature

Dear Michael

DOLOURS PRICE

Cardinal O Fiaich wrote to the Prime Minister and to the Secretary of State on 3 April expressing his concern about the health of Dolours Price, who is serving a life sentence in Armagh Prison.

The background is that the Price sisters were convicted in England in 1973 of causing explosions and of conspiracy to cause explosions and each sentenced to life imprisonment with concurrent terms of 20 years which, allowing for the 50% remission which operates in Northern Ireland, would run out in 1983. Following force-feeding in England prior to their transfer to Northern Ireland in 1975,

You will recall that Marian was released on licence on 30 April 1980 on medical grounds.

Dolours was considered to be the more robust of the two sisters, but since Marian's release her health has had to be kept under fairly constant surveillance. Until a few weeks ago Dolours' health had not been giving any particular cause for concern, but for a time now her condition has been causing the doctors considerable anxiety. Her weight was 8st 2lbs when she arrived in Armagh prison in 1975; it was 7st 8lbs last September; she is now down to 5st 6lbs, and the medical advice is that if weight loss continues she will be in danger of death from inanition and/or metabolic upset, with the added risk of some infection intervening because of her generally weak state. She is depressed and talks from time to time of suicide, but the doctors do not think that suicide is a serious risk.

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The prisoner continues to vomit frequently after taking food, and the vomiting has been going on despite the fact that she has been taking even less food than previously. While there is reason to believe that her attitude has been influenced by Father Murray, the Roman Catholic chaplain at the prison (who has been and still is doing his best to stir up agitation for her release), the doctors believe that her basic condition is now well established beyond her conscious control. They think it unlikely that she would make an early recovery even if she were released from prison now.

She has been seen recently by two outside consultant psychiatrists and twice during the last few days by a consultant physician, Dr Weaver. It is likely that on Monday 13 April she will be transferred from Armagh to the secure ward at Musgrave Park Hospital in Belfast, where she will be under Dr Weaver's supervision; this move is being made not because her condition is yet critical (although it may soon become so), but so that she can receive the close medical care and surveillance which it is difficult to provide satisfactorily in a small prison hospital.

My Secretary of State does not believe that the time has yet come for Miss Price to be released on licence on medical grounds - her release would also, as in her sister's case, involve the remission of the balance of the 20 year sentence by the use of the Royal Prerogative - but it seems quite possible that in a short time he may have to recommend just that if she is not to die in custody. We shall continue to keep the case under review in the light of the medical reports, and will keep you in touch with developments.

... Meanwhile we can only advise that a sympathetic negative reply should be sent to the Cardinal. A draft which my Secretary of State has approved is attached.

Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins

M W HOPKINS

DRAFT LETTER

FILE NUMBER.....

ADDRESSEE'S REFERENCE.....

To	Enclosures	Copies to be sent to
<p>His Eminence Cardinal Tomas O Fiaich Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland Ara Coeli Armagh Northern Ireland</p> <p>(Full Postal Address)</p>		<p>(Full Address, if Necessary)</p>

LETTER DRAFTED FOR SIGNATURE BY.....

(Name of Signatory)

You wrote to me on 3 April expressing your concern about the health of Miss Dolours Price, who is in Armagh Prison.

It is true that in recent weeks this prisoner's health has been giving increasing cause for concern. However she has been receiving the closest possible medical attention; she has been seen by two consultant psychiatrists, and twice during the last few days by a consultant physician. I am informed that early next week she is likely to be transferred to a health service hospital as a precaution so that the level of medical surveillance can be improved still further.

The various points which you make on Miss Price's behalf have been carefully and sympathetically considered, but I am afraid that the Secretary of State remains of the view that he would not be justified, on present information, in directing her release from the life sentence and in remitting the balance of the fixed sentence of twenty years by the use of the Royal Prerogative. You may be assured, however, that both the Secretary of State and the Minister of State directly responsible for prison matters, Mr Alison, are taking a personal interest in the case and that they both see up-to-date medical reports from time to time.

I do entirely understand the anxiety which Miss Price's condition must be causing to her family. In this connection I should perhaps mention that approval has been given for a consultant nominated by the solicitor acting for the family to examine her for the purpose of providing them with a report on her condition.

I am sorry that I have to send you a reply which I know you will find disappointing, but as I have said Miss Price's condition will continue to be very closely watched.



Ireland

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

6 April 1981

BF 8.4.81

Dolours Price

I enclose a copy of a letter about Miss Dolours Price which the Prime Minister has received from Cardinal O Fiaich. I should be grateful if you could let me have, urgently, a draft reply which the Prime Minister might send to the Cardinal.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

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Mike Hopkins, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.



Ara Coeli
Ard Mhacha/Armagh

3rd April, 1981.

L44 Red CF
6.4-81

Dear Prime Minister, A

I write to you about the extremely serious condition of a prisoner in the Women's Prison situated in this episcopal city.

When I visited the prison yesterday I was appalled to see the deterioration which had taken place in the condition of Miss Dolours Price since my last visit at Christmas 1980.

During the six months before that I had already conveyed my anxiety about her condition to the Northern Ireland Office on several occasions, either orally or in writing, and in January-February 1981 I made my increasing concern known both orally and by letter, to the Northern Ireland Office and to the Chairman of the Prison Board of Visitors. In all cases I recommended her early release. The prisoner's condition has now deteriorated to such an extent, however, that unless she is released without further delay, I fear she will die in the prison.

Dolours Price has now entered on her ninth year in custody. Since the release of her sister last Spring she has got into a state of severe depression and for several years she has suffered from anorexia nervosa brought on by force feeding. She is constantly losing weight in recent months and her weight is now down to 5½ stone. For the past month she is confined to the infirmary part of the prison where she sits, listless and companionless, scarcely able to walk and requiring help on the stairs. From being a vivacious young girl with much talent for drawing, painting and writing, she has become, at thirty, a gaunt spectre, prematurely aged and deprived of any further desire to live. I fear that she has developed strong suicidal tendencies.

I appeal to you and to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to release this prisoner, either under the Royal Prerogative of Mercy or by special licence, because she is now so seriously ill that to keep her any longer in prison will inevitably lead to her death.

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I do not need to stress the potential for further violence which such a death would have in this province at the present time. Neither do I need to recall the many arguments which can be adduced in favour of her release, such as the fact that she is already the longest-serving female prisoner in Northern Ireland, that her conduct in prison has been excellent and she has had a moderating influence on other prisoners, that her connection with the event for which she was sentenced was minimal, and that her continued imprisonment is now interfering with her sister's recovery and is causing great distress and ill-health to other members of the family.

I have already listed these and other reasons for her release in correspondence with the Northern Ireland Office. They are now all aggravated in importance by the stark fact that this girl is dying.

Last week the Northern Ireland Office, with commendable clemency, released a prisoner from the Maze Prison, who was seriously ill. I ask you, in God's name, to exercise the same clemency this week in the case of Dolours Price - even next week may be too late.

Yours sincerely,
Thomas O'Riadh

Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh

The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
Whitehall,
LONDON.