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24th December 1985

Line Minister

De Tom

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THE POLICE BUILDING PROGRAMME IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for your letter of 17th December which we discussed briefly when we met on Wednesday. As you know, I share fully your view of the importance of doing something as soon as possible to demonstrate our determination on this issue and I understand that our officials have had further discussions about the most practical way in which my Department can help.

These discussions have concentrated on ways in which we might be able to meet the RUC's most urgent needs once they have settled on their priorities. We believe that we could provide basic functional police stations to replace bombed buildings and which would give the RUC secure bases from which to operate - although I should make it clear that these would not be direct replacements of the previous buildings and that we would probably only be able to undertake one such project at a time. We would be able to make a start on this quite soon, largely from resources already available within the Province,

The Rt Hon Tom King MP

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although we would expect to bring in some extra specialists. In due course it will also be necessary to bring in a further RE squadron when the additional squadron currently engaged on the OP NICCOLA mortar protection programme completes its tour at the end of February. This work would inevitably involve some detriment to existing engineer tasks and may well include some delay to OP NICCOLA - although we will certainly try to minimise this.

I hope that you will agree that what I have suggested is a sensible basis on which to proceed and that our officials should work out a detailed proposal as soon as the RUC have identified their priorities. I would also hope that we can announce the measures that we have taken at the appropriate time. Our officials will be in touch.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, Geoffrey Howe, Douglas Hurd, Kenneth Baker and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours
Michael*

Michael Heseltine

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