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SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

Rie Hunter

CDN 6/4.

Rt Hon Douglas Hurd CBE MP
Home Secretary
Queen Anne's Gate
LONDON SW1

6 April 1989

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Mr Douglas

PROSCRIPTION OF IRISH PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ORGANISATION (IPLO)

As you may recall, on 16 February there was an attack on the Orange Cross Social Club by three gunmen. Five people were injured and one subsequently died. The IPLO publicly claimed responsibility for the attack, and I have come to the conclusion that in principle, this organisation should now be proscribed in the same way as the IRA, the UVF and the INLA (from which IPLO split in 1987).

Our general policy on proscription has been to confine proscription to organisations primarily and actively involved in the commission of terrorist acts. On this basis, whilst the proscription of IPLO alone would stimulate some interest in other organisations, such as Sinn Fein and the UDA, the two latter can be distinguished from IPLO in so far as they have some legitimate activities, including in the case of Sinn Fein a significant role in the electoral process, and members not involved in terrorism. Whilst proscription of Sinn Fein or the UDA might disrupt those organisations, it could be evaded. The leaders could continue to say and do what they say and do now, either as individuals or in another guise. Proscription of Sinn Fein, and to a lesser extent of the UDA would have major presentational disadvantages for us,

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both within Northern Ireland, and further afield and indeed risk re-inforcing the position of the two organisations in their communities. The broadcasting restrictions have reduced Sinn Fein's propaganda opportunities and the Elected Authorities (NI) Act 1989, just enacted, will impose fresh restrictions on Sinn Fein councillors elected at the May 17 district council elections in Northern Ireland.

I do not believe that the balance of argument on proscription of the UDA and Sinn Fein has shifted since we considered the issue last September. Whilst I shall continue to keep our contingency planning up to date, I do not propose to act against either organisation for the time being.

But the IPLO, though small (about 70 members) is a purely terrorist organisation, I think it anomalous that it should not be proscribed in Northern Ireland. It is an underground terrorist organisation which appears to have no legitimate political, or other activities. Formed as a breakaway movement from the Independent National Liberation Army in early 1987, it operates largely in Belfast, Newry, and Armagh. It claims to share INLA's ultimate objectives of ending the British presence in Northern Ireland and establishing a 32-county socialist republic in Ireland through the use of terrorism, but the majority of its members are hardened terrorists with no real interest in political matters beyond deep hostility to Northern Ireland's membership of the United Kingdom. It has approximately 70 members in Northern Ireland, a proportion of whom are directly involved in terrorist acts and the remainder in support activities such as fund-raising or moving weapons.

The IPLO has claimed responsibility for number of terrorist attacks. These include a letter bomb sent to the DUP MP William McCrea in August; shots fired at an RUC Vehicle Checkpoint also in August; shots fired at an army observation post in Belfast; and explosion outside the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast; and the assassination in September 1988 of Mr William Quee a leading member of the UDA.

There is little doubt that the IPLO is both 'concerned in terrorism or in promoting or encouraging it', the criterion for proscription set out in section 21 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 and 'primarily and actively' involved in the commission of terrorist acts, which is the criterion to which we normally refer in public statements about proscription.

Against this background, I have decided in principle that it would be right to proscribe IPLO, a course which the Chief Constable supports. This would be achieved by an Order made by me under the EPA (it would then be subject to Parliamentary approval in both Houses). To make such an Order at a time when the IPLO is not, for the moment, in the news, would almost certainly provoke unhelpful assertions that we should simultaneously proscribe the UDA or Sinn Fein. I think the proper course is therefore to make the announcement if and when the IPLO is next involved in a terrorist incident.

Accordingly, I have asked my officials to put in hand the necessary preparatory work to enable me to move at speed when the necessary conditions are met. You, and Malcolm Rifkind, will no doubt wish to consider whether parallel action may be needed in Great Britain, though my impression is that IPLO has, at least so far, confined its activities to Northern Ireland.

I am sending a copy of this to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Lord President, the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Scotland, the Lord Privy Seal, the Attorney General and to Sir Robin Butler.

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