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28th January 1990

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Peter

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for your letter of 22nd December ^{*at 11.00*} about the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

The Ministry of Defence as an employer will implement the requirements of the Act to the full, and will act as far as possible within the spirit of the legislation. I am most grateful for your acknowledgement of the particular difficulties we face, and am pleased to note that the FEC will show understanding of those difficulties, where they exist.

There is one point of which you should be aware at this stage, concerning those provisions of the Act relating to the placing of contracts. Officials are currently seeking to develop procedures which would ensure that the relevant provisions are reflected in our contractual processes, and we shall be amending our standard conditions of contract to secure the co-operation of our main contractors in preventing the award of work to unqualified sub-contractors. At the same time I should record that we face difficulties as a consequence of our reliance on a very small number of firms in certain essential areas, especially in construction. In the nature of things the workforce of such firms

The Rt Hon Peter Brooke MP

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tends to be almost exclusively Protestant. If one of these firms were to face difficulties in meeting the requirements of the Act and were to be deemed to be unqualified, we could be faced with particular difficulties, which we would need to discuss in detail with the FEC..

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Geoffrey Howe, Douglas Hurd, other members of H, John Gummer, Richard Luce, Peter Lilley and Malcolm Caithness, and to Sir Robin Butler.

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Tom King

IRELAND: Situation
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