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NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

7 July 1997

PRESS RELEASE BY SECRETARY OF STATE AT 12 NOON

The following is the text of a statement issued today by the Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Dr Mo Mowlam MP:

I recognise the disappointment and the anger which many people are feeling.

I too am very disappointed. It should have been possible for the two sides in this dispute to have found an accommodation. Having put all my efforts into trying to bring that about and to avoid an unpopular decision having to be taken, I recognise what a setback this is.

You heard what the Chief Constable said. The decision he made was forced upon him. He took it as the least worst option - the one which in his professional assessment would cause least risk to life and the preservation of the peace. I commend the Chief Constable and all members of the security forces who under very difficult circumstances yesterday and last night had to implement that very difficult decision. The Chief Constable has my full support but yesterday was a sad day for us all and I know that he feels that too.

I understand the anger there is in the Nationalist community but nothing justifies the orchestrated violence we have seen over the past 24 hours. I appeal to everyone and all those with influence to call for an end to violence immediately. I understand the frustration. But demonstrating it in this way does no-one any good. And it costs us all dear.

The problems seen at Drumcree this weekend cannot be separated from the issues that confront us in Northern Ireland as a whole.

We must not lose sight of that.

The Talks process is designed to address the underlying problems - respect for the cultures and identities of both communities; equal rights and equal respect for both traditions; new political arrangements that both communities can support.

Those Talks can move forward. The two Governments have tabled proposals on decommissioning. They are realistically the only way forward. We want to see all parties engage with those and move this process forward.

It is a week for generosity and constructive engagement in the Talks.

There are other immediate concerns this week. I have seen the Chief Constable this morning. I am also seeing members of the G7 to discuss the economic costs. I intend to

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meet with representatives of both residents group and the Loyal Orders today or during the week.

When I see members of the Orange Order today, I will expect to see some willingness and understanding of the events of this weekend reflected in their words and actions during the days ahead.

There can and should be no triumphalism. We will continue to work to resolve disputes during the rest of this week, but I can only do it if the people involved on both sides are willing.