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CHRISTMAS MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, THE RT HON ROY MASON MP.

I would like to extend to all the people of Northern Ireland my sincere best wishes for a very happy Christmas and for a more peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Since I came here just over 3 months ago I have been very concerned to do everything possible to improve the economic, industrial and employment situation in the face of a serious recession throughout the United Kingdom and the western world. The successes which I have been able to achieve so far have ensured continuity of employment in many areas and the shielding of Northern Ireland from the full effect of the economic cuts which have had to be imposed throughout the rest of the United Kingdom.

It is a tragedy that at a time when every single person in the Province should be pulling together to make a better life for all, some elements of the community to whom the words peace and goodwill are meaningless continue to take life, to destroy property and to take away from ordinary men and women the jobs upon which they depend. To this rabble of gangsters and destroyers I also address a message and it cannot be a message of goodwill. It is an assurance that in 1977 the net around them will tighten. They will be pursued, arrested, charged, and brought before the courts of the land as the criminals they are and when convicted they can expect no special treatment in prison. It is only through their rejection by society, their isolation from the rest of the community and their pursuit and punishment that we can free the people of the Province who are aching to get on with the important task of rebuilding a normal peaceful and prosperous Northern Ireland.

That is a hard message for the law-breakers but I believe it will command the support of the vast majority of the community in our Province. To them I give the assurance that I and my Ministers will work unremittingly in the year ahead to achieve stability through the rule of law, to secure more jobs and greater advantages in the economic field for Northern Ireland and to make "a better life for all" a reality.

she said. ... political amnesty