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Crossmaglen GAA Grounds

1. Following a deterioration of the local security situation, including the murder of two members of the RUC, British troops moved into the RUC station in Crossmaglen in 1970. The station backs onto the GAA grounds and, again because of the security situation, access has been almost exclusively by helicopter. In July 1974, the British authorities compulsorily acquired part of the GAA grounds adjoining the station and built a helicopter landing-pad on it. Despite strong representations at the time, the British refused to rescind the order, pointing out that it was necessary to have a safe landing area for Army helicopters delivering supplies to the RUC station.

2. In November 1976, Seán Ó Síocháin/<sup>(Árd-Stiúrthóir of the GAA)</sup> made representations to the former Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding a further proposed encroachment of the GAA grounds, as well as disturbance caused by British Army activities in the area and damage to GAA property. The matter was taken up with the British authorities by the Embassy in London, who referred to the activities of the British Army in the area, as outlined by Seán Ó Síocháin, and pointed to the difficulties created by such activities. On the question of requisitioning further GAA property, it was urged that the needs of the British Army in the area should be met in some alternative manner which did not involve further difficulties for the GAA.

3. In their reply, the British authorities stated that the facts about the requirements of their security forces in the area were set out in the Northern Ireland Office statement of 8 December 1976 (copy attached). They also gave us assurances that there was absolutely no intention of dispossessing club members of their pitch nor of restricting in any way the access which they enjoyed. With regard to a possible alternative site suggested by the GAA, the British stated that this was an industrial site owned by the Department of Commerce and being developed with help from the Local Enterprise Development Unit. A factory employing 29 persons had already opened on the site and the vacant land was earmarked

for industrial expansion. They added that, even if it were available and desirable to use it for security rather than industrial purposes, the land would be of no use for Army purposes as it was separate from the base.

4. The British authorities accepted that it was unfortunately the case that some interference had taken place as a result of helicopter landings at Crossmaglen and assured the Embassy that every effort would be made to minimise the disturbance. They added that any damage to the playing area was very much regretted and that compensation could be sought.

5. The above information was conveyed to Seán Ó Síocháin by letter on 23 December 1976 and it was suggested to him that the matter should be pursued at local level on the basis of the assurances given by the British authorities. He was also asked to keep in touch regarding future developments so that the matter might be pursued further with the British if the assurances given to us were not honoured or if discussions at local level did not yield satisfactory results.

6. On 11 March 1977 a letter in similar terms was sent to Mr. Ó Síocháin and on 16 August 1977 in a further letter he was informed that the Minister was reviewing the situation with a view to considering what action might be called for in the light of recent developments. In particular, Mr. Ó Síocháin was asked to indicate the result of local discussions which had taken place since December 1976. No reply to any of these letters was received.

7. Mr. Con Murphy, President of the GAA, wrote to the Taoiseach on 30 November 1977 and stated that a part of the Crossmaglen property was being used by the British Army as a dump, that the grounds were being damaged by heavy Army vehicles and commitments on rights of way were not being honoured. He pointed out in addition that all major claims for compensation had been ignored. The Taoiseach replied to Mr. Murphy's letter on 8 December 1977 and stated that, during his visit to Brussels for the meeting of the

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European Council early in December, he had had the opportunity of mentioning to the British Prime Minister the problem of the GAA grounds in Crossmaglen. The British Prime Minister undertook to make enquiries in the matter with Mr. Roy Mason, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but requested that there be no publicity about the approach and the Taoiseach gave an undertaking to that effect. The Taoiseach concluded his letter to Mr. Murphy by promising to consider reminding the British Prime Minister if he had not heard from him within a few weeks.

8. Mr. Murphy again wrote to the Taoiseach on 4 April 1978. He stated that the issue had been discussed at the Annual Congress of the GAA and he appealed to the Taoiseach and to the Minister for Foreign Affairs to take positive steps to put pressure on the British Government to bring the whole affair to a speedy end. A meeting between the Taoiseach and Mr. Murphy is arranged for 3 May. A number of T.D.'s have also made separate representations to the Minister arising out of the discussion at the Annual Congress.