

\*IMMEDIATE MUFAX

TO: \*PS/Secretary of State  
\*PS/Mr Concannon  
Mr Janes  
Mr Hannigan  
\*Mr Marshall  
Mr Parker Mr Irvine, DH  
Mr Clift  
Mr Neilson  
Mr R Templeton

ARCHBISHOP O'FIACH'S STATEMENT ON MAZE PRISON

Herewith full text of Archbishop O'Fiaich's statement issued this morning following his visit to the Maze on Sunday.

We intend to issue a full press statement in reply during the course of this afternoon.

*DRF*

D R FORD  
1 August 1978

STATEMENT BY ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH, DR TOMAS O'FIAICH  
CONCERNING HIS VISIT ON SUNDAY LAST TO H-BLOCK AT LONG KESH  
PRISON, NORTHERN IRELAND.

There are nearly 3,000 prisoners in Northern Ireland today. This must be a cause of grave anxiety to any spiritual leader. Nearly 200 from the Archdiocese of Armagh are among a total of almost 1,800 prisoners in the Maze Prison at Long Kesh. This is the equivalent of all the young men of similar age groups in a typical parish of this diocese.

Last Sunday I met as many as possible of these Armagh prisoners as the bishop appointed to minister to themselves and their families, conscious of Christ's exhortation about visiting those in prison. I am grateful for the facilities afforded me by the authorities.

On this, my second visit as Archbishop to Long Kesh, I was also aware of the grave concern of the Holy See at the situation which has arisen in the prison, and I wanted to be able to provide the Holy See with a factual account of the present position of all prisoners there, something which I shall do without delay.

Having spent the whole of Sunday in the prison I was shocked by the inhuman conditions prevailing in H-Blocks 3, 4 and 5, where over 300 prisoners are incarcerated. One would hardly

allow an animal to remain in such conditions, let alone a human being. The nearest approach to it that I have seen was the spectacle of hundreds of homeless people living in sewer-pipes in the slums of Calcutta. The stench and filth in some of the cells, with the remains of rotten food and human excreta scattered around the walls, was almost unbearable. In two of them I was unable to speak for fear of vomiting.

The prisoners' cells are without beds, chairs or tables. They sleep on mattresses on the floor and in some cases I noticed that these were quite wet. They have no covering except a towel or blanket, no books, newspapers or reading material except the Bible (even religious magazines have been banned since my last visit), no pens or writing material, no TV or radio, no hobbies or handicrafts, no exercise or recreation. They are locked in their cells for almost the whole of every day and some of them have been in this condition for more than a year and a half.

The fact that a man refuses to wear prison uniform or to do prison work should not entail the loss of physical exercise, association with his fellow prisoners or contact with the outside world. These are basic human needs for physical and mental health, not privileges to be granted or withheld as rewards or punishments. To deprive anyone of them over a long

Review →

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situation

How many of the prisoners work?

period - irrespective of what led to the deprivation in the first place - is surely a grave injustice and cannot be justified in any circumstances. The human dignity of every prisoner must be respected regardless of his creed, colour or political viewpoint, and regardless of what crimes he has been charged with. I would make the same plea on behalf of Loyalist prisoners, but since I was not permitted to speak to any of them, despite a request to do so, I cannot say for certain what their present condition is.

Several prisoners complained to me of beatings, of verbal abuse, of additional punishments (in cold cells without even a mattress) for making complaints, and of degrading searches carried out on the most intimate parts of their naked bodies. Of course, I have no way of verifying these allegations, but they were numerous.

In the circumstances I was surprised that the morale of the prisoners was high. From talking to them it is evident that they intend to continue their protest indefinitely and it seems they prefer to face death rather than submit to being classed as criminals. Anyone with the least knowledge of Irish history knows how deeply rooted this attitude is in our country's past. In isolation and perpetual boredom they maintain their sanity by studying Irish. It was an indication of the triumph of the human spirit over adverse material surroundings to notice Irish words, phrases and songs being shouted from cell to cell and then written on each cell wall with the remnants of

*BOV*  
*Prisoners*

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*sanity*  
*by*  
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toothpaste tubes.

The authorities refuse to admit that these prisoners are in a different category from the ordinary, yet everything about their trials and family background indicates that they are different. They were sentenced by special courts without juries. The vast majority were convicted on allegedly voluntary confessions obtained in circumstances which are now placed under grave suspicion by the recent report of Amnesty International. Many are very youthful and come from families which had never been in trouble with the law, though they lived in areas which suffered discrimination in housing and jobs. How can one explain the jump in the prison population of Northern Ireland from 500 to 3,000 unless a new type of prisoner has emerged?

The problem of these prisoners is one of the great obstacles to peace in our community. As long as it continues it will be a potent cause of resentment in the prisoners themselves, breeding frustration among their relatives and friends and leading to bitterness between the prisoners and the prison staff. It is only sowing the seeds of future conflict.

*Comment  
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2. made  
see lower  
below*

Pending the full resolution of the deadlock, I feel it essential to urge that everything required by the normal man to maintain his physical and mental health and to live a life which is tolerably human should be restored to these prisoners without delay.