



LE PRÉSIDENT

Geneva, October 2, 1981

*M. Secretary of State*

... I am sending you enclosed eight copies of the general report on the visits which International Committee of the Red Cross delegates carried out to prisons in Northern Ireland from July 16 to July 22, 1981.

As a matter of principle and of established policy, the ICRC regards these reports as confidential documents, intended only for the detaining authority; the only aims of these reports are to describe the detention conditions encountered by its delegates and to make recommendations for their improvement, if necessary.

The Rt. Hon. James Prior, MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Soon after the conclusion of our visits to the Northern Ireland prisons, we handed to the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom in Geneva a memorandum, dated July 30, 1981, which summed up our principal findings and recommendations (this memorandum, annexed to the visiting report concerning the Maze prison, is part and parcel of our general report). In the intervening time, our views, as expressed in this memorandum, have not basically changed; but we do wish to comment on a few points contained therein for the sake of clarity.

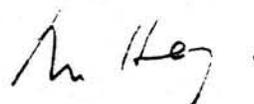
We are aware that the issue of integration of Republican and Loyalist prisoners has implications which go far beyond the prison walls. However, as a neutral and purely humanitarian institution, the ICRC in no way intends to involve itself in the politics of Northern Ireland; and the recommendation it expressed under point 5 of its memorandum of July 30, 1981, as well as in some of the prison reports, should therefore not be interpreted as advocating a general policy of segregation in the prisons. This recommendation simply reflects the many individual expressions of anxiety and requests for segregation which Republican and Loyalist prisoners put to our delegates, as well as the delegates' concern that whenever integration might endanger the safety of a prisoner or group of prisoners, it should not be forced on him or them.

In expressing its opinion on the differences between the prisoners' and the detaining authorities' respective positions concerning the substance of the five demands (point 6 of the memorandum), the ICRC does not ignore, nor does it wish to minimize, the practical and political aspects of the matter. However, in its role as a prison-visiting organization, the ICRC must necessarily limit itself to observing the material and psychological detention conditions prevailing inside a given prison or prison system.

Looking at the matter from this point of view, the ICRC continues to think that certain differences between the authorities and the prisoners concerning the five demands could be resolved in a practical and concrete way, without any loss of security. The provision of personal clothing to the prisoners could, for instance, be done through the intermediary of the ICRC. Additional education facilities could be provided for the prisoners while yet maintaining the principle of prison work as a necessary part of running the prison. And more facilities for association between prisoners, for example visits to and from adjacent wings of an H-Block, should be possible while maintaining the necessary control and security.

Practical measures of this kind might help in bringing about a reduction of tension, which the ICRC, among others, very much hopes for.

Please accept, Mr. Secretary of State, the assurance of my highest consideration.



Alexandre Hay