

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

6 January 1976

*My dear Taoiseach,*

I asked Merlyn Rees to come back specially from Northern Ireland this afternoon so that I could review fully the situation in Armagh with him, the Secretary of State for Defence and some of my other colleagues with the help of the Defence Chiefs. I have just finished and I want to let you know straight away that we are taking, and intend to take, all possible steps to deal with this situation in the light of the dreadful events of the past few days.

There should be no under-estimating the gravity of the situation. Both Catholics and Protestants are in very real fear of their lives and the risk that one group or the other will continue to murder is high.

Merlyn Rees got all the Northern Ireland politicians together this morning and also saw the ULCCC and pressed them to use their influence in favour of moderation, but they are under very heavy pressure from their rank and file.

Extra police and troops have already been drafted into the area but given the nature of the situation and the fact that there is a debate on the Convention Report in Parliament on Monday next more needs to be done. The Spearhead Battalion has started to move today over to Northern Ireland and will be deployed in South Armagh. We need to catch a relatively small number of people, on both sides, and no effort will be spared.

/I wanted you



I wanted you also to know that we propose soon to despatch part of the Special Air Service who are trained particularly for surveillance and are particularly well suited for the kind of problem which we face. We are also examining urgently a number of other measures and Merlyn will be able to talk to Pat Cooney when he sees him on Thursday and Frank Cooper will be able to give additional details when he comes to Dublin on Friday.

I am very conscious of the need to be seen to be dealing on an even-handed basis, and both in what we do and what we say we shall be concerned with the whole of Armagh and the "murder triangle".

I am certain that we shall need to step up our co-operation on the Border and we are indeed grateful for all the help that has been given to us in the past months and for the excellent results that the Gardai have achieved.

It is a sad start to the New Year but we are utterly determined to bring matters in Northern Ireland to a happier state.

Yours,

Harold Wilson

His Excellency Mr. Liam Cosgrave, TD.