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Statement by Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. on State Department authorization of shipment of U.S. manufactured arms to Northern Ireland Police

I have confirmed with the State Department the fact that it authorized the sale of 3,000 Magnum 357 handguns and 500 .223 automatic rifles to the Royal Ulster Constabulary of Northern Ireland.

Shipments of arms to anyone in Northern Ireland by anyone in the United States should not be sanctioned by the State Department. The Department's action in this matter undermines efforts by U.S. political leaders to reduce support by U.S. citizens for the forces that seek to unify Ireland through violence.

Despite recent reforms, the past record of the Royal Ulster Constabulary is not one of impartiality in maintaining law and order and the sale will therefore be viewed by many here as U.S. Government support for a particular faction in Northern Ireland.

I appreciate the difficulty of maintaining peace in Northern Ireland and I condemn the recent series of murders of police and security officials there, but the U.S. Government promotes peace best by preventing, rather than permitting, arms shipments to Northern Ireland.

I am notifying the State Department of my views and I am recommending that the Department not authorize such shipments in the future.