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Note for Government

Libya/IRA

1. The relationship between Libya and the IRA, which has not been a matter of major concern since the mid-70's, has re-emerged as an issue in the context of the UK-Libya dispute following the killing outside the Libyan People's Bureau in London of WPC Fletcher. The Department of Foreign Affairs has closely monitored Colonel Gaddafi's remarks since the killing of WPC Fletcher. The Minister for Foreign Affairs has made a statement and has arranged for representations to be made to the Libyan authorities and contact to be made with the UK authorities.
2. The phase of active Libyan support for the IRA culminated in the Claudia affair in March 1973 when a ship which had been loaded with Soviet arms in Tripoli was intercepted by the Irish Navy off Helvick Head and a number of people arrested. While the Libya-IRA relationship continued in a substantial form for some years after that, it declined markedly from 1975 onwards. This probably resulted from a number of factors - pressure from the Irish and British Governments on the matter, a Libyan desire for better relations with both countries (agreement to establish diplomatic relations with Ireland was reached in 1977), disputes with the IRA and the visit of a UDA delegation to Libya.
3. In 1976, Gaddafi told Newsweek (20/9/76) that 'the IRA chapter is behind us'. He went on to imply, however, that his dropping of the IRA was tactical and temporary: 'I believe we should drop anything that does not present us with an imperative urgency'. The period from the mid-70's up to Gaddafi's statements of last week was marked by occasional bursts of rhetorical support for the IRA and the line that Libya was giving the IRA moral but not material support. When the first Irish ambassador to Libya presented credentials in Tripoli in 1979, the Libyan Foreign Minister went out of his way to say that Libya did not approve of terrorism or violence. The UK authorities, although keeping a close and continuing watch on the matter, stated publicly that no links that would give cause for concern existed. At various stages in the evolution of official Irish-Libyan relations the Department of Foreign Affairs has consulted the Department of Justice about Libyan links with subversives but no obstacles to the development of relations have been put forward. Typical of Gaddafi's rhetorical gestures in this period was his letter in August 1981 to the UN Secretary General urging him to intervene in the H-Block hunger strikes issue.

4. The Irish authorities have continued to avail of opportunities which have arisen to impress on the Libyans our view of the IRA and of the Northern Ireland question. When Minister of State Collins and a delegation visited Libya in February this year, the Minister of State raised the question of terrorism with the Libyan Minister with responsibility for relations with Ireland. He explained that reunification of Ireland would have to come about by peaceful means, that there was no popular support in Ireland for terrorist activities and that he hoped that Libya understood clearly our position. The Libyan response was that they understood our position and that Libya was giving no support to the IRA. Libya supported the clear wish of the whole Irish people to unity.

5. The UK/Libya dispute following the killing of WPC Fletcher in London on 17 April has led to renewed talk by Gaddafi of Libyan support for the IRA. He was interviewed on French television on 30 April, and in a translation of the Libyan version of his remarks is quoted as saying:

"We declare our full support for the independence and unity of Ireland. Even if we condemn British practices as well as those of the IRA, the essential of the problem is a just cause, and we are at the side of the Irish people in its struggle for independence and unity. If Great Britain considers the IRA as a terrorist organisation, we consider that those who have deserted the (Libyan) revolution and reside now in Great Britain, are also terrorists. If certain countries want to support those whom we consider as terrorists, then we have the right to support these organisations. In fact, we are seriously envisaging the support of these organisations should these countries continue to support terrorist Libyan organisations outside Libya. The first of these organisations will be the IRA. We will open bureaus for it and Libya will support it with all its means until Great Britain and Libya agree not to support terrorism against either country".

On 2 May, Colonel Gaddafi gave a press conference in Tripoli which was attended by an RTE reporter. The lunchtime radio news that day carried a report saying that Gaddafi had spoken of "restoring our friendship with the IRA, the honest people who are fighting for the independence of their country from British colonialism". In response to an RTE question about

meeting IRA leaders, Gaddafi said "we already know them because of our contact in the 70's and now that Britain has behaved like this we shall resume our support". Portions of the interview, in which Gaddafi spoke via an interpreter, were shown on the RTE television news bulletin on the evening of 2 May. This bulletin also carried a Government statement to the effect that Colonel Gaddafi's remarks were viewed with grave concern and were being taken up with the Libyan authorities.

6. Prior to the 2 May interview, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, had in any event been considering raising the matter of the French television interview with the Libyan authorities. Following the RTE broadcast at lunchtime on 2 May arrangements were expedited for:

- (i) the Ambassador in Rome to contact the Libyans in Tripoli, and in Rome where he would leave with them a note, to make known our grave concern about the offer of support for the IRA (see copy of telex c25 2/5/84).
- (ii) contact to be made with the UK authorities to let them know how we viewed the matter and to learn their assessment of Gaddafi's remarks.

7. The Ambassador in Rome (who is also Ambassador to Libya) tried in vain to speak by phone to Zlitni, the Libyan Minister with special responsibility for relations with Ireland, on 3 May. He spoke instead to a high-ranking official of the Libyan equivalent of a Foreign Ministry and read out the text of our note. The official seemed shaken by our protest; he said he would "look after it". On 7 May the Ambassador called by appointment to the Libyan People's Bureau in Rome and in the course of a 45 minute meeting with the head of the bureau explained fully the Government's position on the IRA. The Ambassador left with him the text of the speaking note and will be forwarding other material, including a document in Arabic on the Northern Ireland question and the New Ireland Forum Report, to the Libyan authorities. The head of the People's Bureau said that possibly there was a misunderstanding about what Gaddafi had said. The Ambassador replied that if this were so, the Irish Government would be most anxious to have any corrections.

8. Contact was made by phone on 2 May with the FCO to let the UK know of our concern, of the action we proposed to take and to seek a UK assessment of the significance of Gaddafi's remarks. An official of the Irish Embassy in London was briefed on the UK view in the FCO on 3 May. A full report is contained in

telex c 136 of 3/5/84. The thrust of the British presentation was that the Libyans had not yet decided to translate rhetoric into action. They were mainly concerned with "show". If a decision was taken, support was likely to be slow and small.

9. In parallel with these developments, discussions have been taking place with the Libyan authorities on the holding of the second session of the Irish-Libyan Joint Commission. This is in turn connected with the oil for beef issue. A separate note on this matter is annexed.

Department of Foreign Affairs

7 May, 1984