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PRESS RELEASE

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER (MAJOR THE RT HON J D CHICHESTER-CLARK DL MP)

On 10 October 1969 the Government announced the adoption of the principle of a civilianised and normally unarmed RUC. In doing so Ministers took into account -

- (1) the fact that the force had already been working towards a situation in which policemen on ordinary duties would not normally carry arms;
- (2) the expressed view of the Representative Body that the force itself would welcome such a decision; and
- (3) the recommendation of the Hunt Committee that a civilianised and normally unarmed status would facilitate a valuable relationship between police and public and thereby greatly assist the police in their work.

A Referendum has now been conducted under the auspices of the Representative Body, and the figures published today show that while there is a considerable division of opinion within the force, the majority of those voting support this policy - that is to say a normally unarmed status, coupled, of course, with ready access to weapons where necessary.

I fully appreciate, as I have done all along, that the views of members of the force represent one relevant and indeed important factor in this situation and these views will no doubt be given full weight when the Chief Constable receives the Report of a Committee representative of the Force which is currently studying the ready availability of suitable weapons within the terms of the Hunt recommendations.

Nevertheless while giving full weight to these feelings evidently held by, at any rate, a section of opinion in the force, I have to weigh other and wider considerations.

I remain convinced that provided the police have adequate and swift access to arms where necessary the present policy continues to be that which best serves the widest interests, not only of the police service but of the community as a whole.

I therefore wish to make it clear that Government policy on police arms will remain unchanged.

15 September 1970