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PA - with earlier papers

FROM: P JOHNSTON  
PS/SIR JOHN WHEELER  
8 SEPTEMBER 1995

~~Mr. Carson..~~

To see a file..

S. 12 / 9..

- cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B
- PS/PUS (L&B) B
- PS/Sir David Fell B
- Mr Legge - M
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Bell B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Marshall, S. 12 B
- Mr Corbett, CCRU 9.. - M
- Miss McGimpsey - B
- Miss Meldrum, SPOBI B

MR PERRY - B

SIR JOHN WHEELER'S MEETING WITH MR SEAMUS MCKENDRY AND THE 'FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED' - 7 SEPTEMBER 1995

The Minister was grateful for the briefing provided by Miss Meldrum for his meeting with Mr Seamus McKendry, Families of the Disappeared, which took place yesterday afternoon. Mr McKendry was accompanied by Mrs McKinney, Mrs McClory and Mr Manley. You provided official support.

2. This was essentially an exercise in listening and providing sympathy. Sir John said that the most basic and fundamental human right is the right to life; it nauseated him that even after this right had been taken away the basic decency of allowing relatives to know where their dead family members were buried was being denied. The Minister spoke for the Government and the Prime Minister in expressing his sympathy for the families and assured them that the Government would exert all the pressure which it could on those who had the information which they sought.

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3. Mr McKendry said there was a fear, caused by media speculation, that the families might be used as political bargaining pieces ie 'If the Government were to lighten up on decommissioning Sinn Fein/IRA might give up a body or two'. The Minister said that there was no question of the Government being held to ransom in such a way; the matter of decommissioning was one of democracy and the thought that Sinn Fein/PIRA might gain political advantage from providing or withholding information on a matter of basic decency was obscene. The Minister also said that he wished that some of the international human rights bodies which were fond of visiting Northern Ireland would speak up for the families; Sir John encouraged the families to speak to the US Consul to put pressure on the Irish/American constituency. The families had been greatly boosted by President Clinton's mention of their plight at the Economic Conference in May; they had written to him again.

4. Mr Perry said that there had been some media speculation at the weekend suggesting that the families might receive some information from PIRA/Sinn Fein as "part of the peace process". Mr McKendry said that he had read the article in 'Scotland on Sunday' and subsequently spoke to the journalist. The journalist said that the information which he had, had come from a senior source on the "Balaclava" side (as opposed to the Sinn Fein side). Sinn Fein councillor Richard McAuley had visited Mr McKendry that afternoon and explained that Gerry Adams had not forgotten the families (briefing Mr McKendry in exactly the same terms as the 'Scotland on Sunday' article but denying that Sinn Fein had anything to do with the briefing). Mr McKendry had rebuked Mr McAuley about suggestions that the information would become available "at the right time"; the families felt that the right time was now.

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5. The families asked how the matter had been addressed at XD. Sir John said that it had been raised as a requirement to building trust and confidence; the only response which the Government, like the families, was interested in was action not sympathetic murmurings of concern.

#### Conclusion

6. This meeting primarily allowed the families to see that their plight was being treated seriously at the highest level. It also enabled the Minister to give reassurances that there was no question of political trade offs on this issue. The meeting did provide a media opportunity for the Minister and the families to reiterate the message that those with influence must help the families in their quest to give their loved ones a decent burial.

SIGNED

Paul A Johnston  
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OAB Ext. 6498  
8 September 1995

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