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Dear David,

NORTHERN IRELAND BROADCASTING RESTRICTIONS

I think you will be aware that the Prime Minister has asked my Secretary of State to examine the way the present broadcasting restrictions in relation to Northern Ireland are operating. This is in response to concern about the way that broadcasters have been using sophisticated lip-synching techniques to give a very realistic impression of Mr Gerry Adams' voice during the course of interviews with him.

We have a great deal of accumulated information already about the political and constitutional pros and cons of the present arrangements and any extension or removal of them. The provisions have been reviewed to a limited extent before, particularly when the Broadcasting Act 1990 was passing through Parliament.

However my Secretary of State believes that this intervention provides an opportunity to take a fresh look at the restrictions and to consult his colleagues on the way they are operating. The purpose of this letter is to invite you, within three weeks, to let me have your observations on the present arrangements.

In case you are not familiar with them, I should like to remind you that four matters influenced the Home Secretary in reaching the decision to issue Notices to the broadcasting authorities requiring them to refrain from broadcasting direct statements by Northern Ireland terrorist organisations and their apologists. The first was that offence had been caused to viewers and listeners

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by the appearance of the apologists for terrorism, particularly after a terrorist outrage. Secondly such appearances had afforded terrorists undeserved publicity, which was contrary to public interest. Thirdly these appearances had tended to increase the standing of terrorist organisations and create a false impression that support for terrorism is itself a legitimate political opinion. Fourthly the view was taken that broadcast statements were intended to have, and did in some cases have, the effect of intimidating some of those at whom they were directed.

A key aspect of the review will be, therefore, a re-assessment of whether these four considerations should continue to form the basis of Government policy in this area, and whether there are other considerations which now ought to be addressed. We will also need to reflect on the extent to which the measures presently in place have been effective in addressing these matters. If they have not been, and the implication of the Prime Minister's remarks is that they may not have been, it would then be necessary to consider whether further measures are required or whether the existing ones should be modified or abandoned.

The Secretary of State for National Heritage has a rather different range of responsibilities from the Home Secretary who introduced these restrictions. In particular we will be heavily dependent on our colleagues for an assessment of the extent to which these measures serve a specific security purpose. This is not an aspect which the Home Secretary appears to have stressed in 1988 and it would be helpful to know whether this is an angle to which particular attention or weight should be given in reaching conclusions.

I hope that fairly soon we will be able to provide you with a clearer indication of the way in which our findings will be cleared formally with colleagues at official level and by the Secretary of State with Cabinet colleagues. In the meantime, I should mention that we are also writing to the bodies responsible for regulating broadcasting to ask them to add to the observations they have given us in the past about the restrictions and how they operate.

I am writing in similar terms to the Home Office, the Cabinet Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and No. 10.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Edwards

PETER C EDWARDS
Head of Media Division

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