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House of Commons Statement by the Secretary of State
for Northern Ireland

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the current security situation.

The House will be aware of the recent serious increase in the number of casualties caused by terrorist action. In the last week in particular two members of the RUC, one UDR soldier and three civilians have been murdered. The civilian deaths, were of the foreman of a building company, and most recently the murder of Lord Justice Gibson and Lady Gibson. In respect of the details of this latest outrage, while I have not yet received the full report on it, I have had an initial discussion with the Deputy Chief Constable and the GOC and will be meeting the Chief Constable and the GOC again later today. However, I am giving the House some further information. The explosives were in a blue cortina car, which had been reported stolen a month ago in South Armagh. At the time of its theft the car had GB number plates. It is believed to have been left only a few minutes earlier at the side of the road between the border crossing point and the security force checkpoint. The method of detonation appears to have been by radio signal. In addition to the two fatalities, there were nine other people injured. The question has been rightly raised as to how there could have been any outside knowledge of Sir Maurice and Lady Gibsons movements. The RUC advised me of evidence that the bookings were made in their own names through a travel agency in Belfast on December 29th and that on February 12th a change was made to the date of their return. The booking form included the description and registration No. of the car. Further detailed investigations are continuing and I will inform the House as appropriate of any further information. I know the whole House will share with me the feelings of horror at this outrage, at the loss of a distinguished and brave member of the Northern

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Ireland judiciary and of his wife, and to express our deepest sympathy to their families. But Mr. Speaker while public

It is quite wrong not to express our deep concern equally about the other tragic victims of this most recent and savage burst of terrorist violence. The recent and cowardly attacks on off duty members of the security forces, coupled with murders of policemen in Newcastle and Portrush, and the murder of the civilian prison instructor at Magee College and the use of his body to lure two further members of the RUC to their deaths, and indicative of a renewed desperation and viciousness in the IRA campaign. The security forces will meet the challenge of these new tactics by the IRA with the resolution and courage that have stood them so well in the past and the Government will give them all possible support in their vital task. But while the role of the RUC and armed forces is crucial in the front line against terrorism, they need also the unqualified support of the community as a whole in their task. The clear purpose of the IRA at this time, is to undermine the morale of the security forces, to increase tension and hatred between the communities and this to seek to provoke overreaction from Unionist/Loyalist, and to create distrust and ill will between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. That is their purpose but they will not succeed.

The security forces have given abundant proof of their courage and determination to stand against terrorism. What they now look to is the whole community to show the same steadfastness in the face of the current campaign and for everybody to show particular vigilance over their personal security. Above all it is the time when the whole community must give its unqualified support for the RUC and the armed forces, and give the fullest cooperation in this vital fight to defeat the terrorists.