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~~DRAFT~~

Ms S Murphy
General Secretary
Committee for Reconciliation
3 Carnaght Park
Hospital Road
NEWRY
Co Down

1 June 1987

Dear Ms Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 11 May, which has been passed to me by Mr Hunter, and which I have just seen on my return from a visit to Canada and the United States. I apologise for the fact that, for obvious reasons, I could not reply to you more promptly, as I should have wished to do.

Let me say at once that, from my experience with the Housing Executive, I fully accept that many families in Northern Ireland have suffered loss, disturbance, and distress as a result of the loss of their homes through sectarian or civil strife. I have the greatest sympathy with them, and did my utmost during my time with the Executive to help provide them with new and, where possible, better homes. But however great my personal sympathy, I am afraid this Fund is not in a position to help them.

The main difficulty is that, though the original Agreement between the British and Irish Governments provided for a very wide range of possible objectives, it provided also that the Board of the Fund should take into account the wishes expressed by the donors. So far, the Canadian government has expressed a wish that its contribution should be spent mainly on youth exchange schemes; and the US Government, by far the largest contributor, has said that it wishes its contribution to be spent primarily on job creation, and the stimulation and promotion of private sector employment and prosperity. In the course of my recent visit to Canada and the States, both elected representatives and officials confirmed these priorities in quite specific terms. The advertisement which appeared on 15th January, to which you replied, made it clear that the Board would give priority to applications of this kind; as did the explanatory notes on the application form which you completed; so I do not think you should be too greatly surprised.

You refer to the money available to the Board as 'public money': but really, it is more like trust money, to be spent in accordance with the wishes of those by whom it was subscribed. Although the Board is entirely independent of all the governments concerned, and has therefore a degree of flexibility in interpreting its role, it does feel that he who pays the piper is entitled to call the tune; and so, would not wish to ride roughshod over the expressed preferences of the donor countries, which have indeed been extremely generous.

I must add also that, given the overwhelming number and total amount of the applications received - exceeding the amount at the Board's disposal many times over - even if circumstances were to change, I think the Board would still be unlikely to favour payments by way of recompense for past suffering or misfortune, as opposed to investments in a potentially better future for the next generation.

You ask for a list of successful applications: I enclose a copy of the press statement issued on 15 April, a few days after the receipt by the Board of the first instalment of the US contribution, which lists all the payments approved to date, and outlines the programmes envisaged for the future.

Before writing you this letter, I have re-read carefully all the papers on the file, including your application form: but in the circumstances, I fear I cannot recommend the Board to reconsider your case. I appreciate that this will come as a disappointment to you, and to the 850 households you represent: I am sincerely sorry that this should be so; but I am afraid it simply is not in my power to do anything for you.

Yours sincerely

C.E.B. BRETT

(Clarone, Guelphford Fund)