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Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast BT4 3ST

Kevin McNamara Esq MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

cc'd Mr. Gallagher ✓
Mr. McLahon ✓
A-1 Secretariat ✓

October 1988

Mr Kevin,

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21/10/88.

When I wrote to you on 14 September I said that I would write again as soon as I had received advice from the RUC about a number of points which the Reverend Fathers Brian Lennon, Patrick Doyle, David Byrne, and Senan Timoney of 'Tona' 211 Churchill Park, Portadown, had raised with you about Orange parades in the town on 10 and 12 July.

Let me say at the outset that responsibility for parades and marches in Northern Ireland is an operational matter which is the responsibility of the Chief Constable of the RUC. It is therefore for the police to consider whether a proposed march is likely to pose a threat to public order, and if necessary the police may impose such conditions as they consider necessary to prevent disorder, damage, disruption and intimidation.

In the case of Portadown the question of parades and marches is not an easy one for the police. The town has a 70% Protestant population and has a long history of association with Orange Order marches. Over the past three years the main problems arose from orange parades in the Obins Street area in the centre of Portadown. As the Reverend Fathers will be aware, in 1985 Orange parades were prohibited from entering Obins Street and Woodhouse Street, and the police have refused to allow members of the Orange Order to use these routes in subsequent years. The Orange Order are only

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KEVIN MCNAMARA M.P. TEL No.01 219 3398

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permitted to march along the Garvaghy Road (a main route through a predominantly nationalist area linking two Protestant areas) on two occasions each year including a parade to the local church. The decision to allow these two parades was considered by the police to be in the interest of peace within both communities. I understand that members of the nationalist community hold their parades in the mainly Catholic Obins Street and Woodhouse Street areas of the town centre, while Protestant organisations are excluded from parading in that part of the town.

I now turn to the specific points in the final paragraph of Father Lannon's letter, on 10 July 748 members of the security forces were deployed in Garvaghy Road while 416 were on duty on 12 July. Although the operation in Portadown was under the command of the Commanding Officer of 11 UDR, a regular army officer, soldiers from 11 UDR were not deployed in the town itself, but on patrolling duties on the periphery. However, as Commander 11 UDR was in Portadown on both days, he would have been accompanied by his own Escort Group. I assume it was these soldiers that the priests saw in Garvaghy Road. I can confirm however that there were no UDR patrols on duty on the road or elsewhere nearby.

I cannot give you a precise figure for the costs incurred by the security forces. Military expenditure is not normally allocated to individual operations but I can tell you that the RUC costs on 10 and 12 July were approximately £66,000. The number of members of the Orange Order who were involved in the parade on 10 July was 1,200 while 200 took part on 12 July.

* Mrs. Brid Lopez was given similar information at the time.

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Finally, more than 2000 parades and marches are held in Northern Ireland each year, the vast majority of which pass off quietly and without causing offence to others. It is of course vital that the organisers and those taking part co-operate with the security forces to ensure that parades and marches pass off peacefully. I am pleased to say that for the past two or three years there have been very few incidents at marches, and the police have noticed, this year more than ever, a desire from the organisers that the parades should be trouble free and not cause offence.

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