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URGENT

FAX COVER SHEET

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For: D. O'Donovan

From: D. Donoghue, Emb. London

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FAX - URGENT

For D. O'Donovan

From D. Donoghue

Subject: Debate in Commons following King's Statement (21 March)

1. As previously reported by phone, Kevin McNamara opened the debate with a statement which expressed support for the policing decision taken by the Chief Constable last Saturday but also welcomed the review announced by the Secretary of State. The Chief Constable would have to decide how best to police events in an emotionally charged atmosphere. He would have to proceed on a case-by-case basis. Some questions had to be asked about Saturday's incident:

- Was the Army informed of the policing plans for last week's funerals and, if so, when?
- Were the two Corporals briefed about the funerals and the route which they should follow?
- Would there be further arrests in relation to Saturday's incident?
- While the allegation that the security forces decided not to intervene was reprehensible, could the Secretary of State confirm nonetheless that no such decision had been taken?
- What role did the helicopter play in summoning assistance?

McNamara welcomed the news of the forthcoming Conference meeting. Labour found this preferable to the suggestions in some quarters that a meeting between the Taoiseach and the PM should take place. "Gesture politics of a summit nature are not proper at present". A summit would require careful planning and preparation. However, the PM should begin

to play a more active part in Irish affairs; as a signatory to the A-I Agreement, she should resume an active interest in the period leading up to the review.

2. In response, King said that there had been a general briefing for the army at the beginning of last week on the security problems posed by the funerals. The route on which the two soldiers had found themselves was not an approved route at any time (other than for those on operational duty). The allegation that the security forces had been prevented from intervening was a gross calumny on the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the integrity of senior officers. Regarding the helicopter's role, it had taken some time to clarify precisely what was happening on the ground (the initial impression was that it might have been a Loyalist attack on the funerals). The RUC knew that there were no soldiers whatsoever in the area. As soon as what was happening became clear, the RUC acted with speed but unfortunately they were too late to rescue the soldiers.

3. Jim Molyneux asked what wider considerations had preceded the RUC's "stand-off" decision and he suggested that the A-I Agreement was proving to be a disaster. King noted that Molyneux had chosen not to repeat in the House his allegation of political interference (which was absolutely untrue) and he referred to the Chief Constable's operational independence as clearly indicated in the A-I Agreement. He denied that there were any "no-go areas" in NI.

4. John Hume said that the state of feeling in West Belfast last week had been such that there would have been very serious violence if the security forces had mounted their usual operation. The RUC and Army took the correct decision in these circumstances and he supported them. Hume underlined the desperate need for dialogue in NI. King took up the later theme, urging politicians in NI to provide leadership.

5. Peter Robinson suggested that the soldiers had refrained from opening fire because of fear of repercussions. He asked the Secretary of State to make clear that he would stand behind any members of the security forces who had to defend their lives in such circumstances. He criticised the Chief Constable's decision to "abdicate" policing responsibility to the IRA in West Belfast last Saturday. He hoped to see progress towards a system of government which could produce peace, reconciliation and stability in NI. King confirmed that the two soldiers had an absolute right to defend their own lives and praised the restraint they had shown. He denied, however, that policing had been in any sense "abdicated". He mentioned that, while the earlier funeral had passed off peacefully, there had been some discouraging signs at Saturday's funeral which indicated an attempt "to push the boundary back towards paramilitary displays". King also welcomed Robinson's final comment.

6. David Alton expressed full support for King personally in the present difficult circumstances, described the Agreement as the best means of defeating terrorism and hoped to see an early summit with an agenda including a Joint Security Commission. He queried the policy of allowing soldiers on duty to drive around in civilian clothes and in unmarked cars. King said that he and the Tanaiste would be meeting this week. A meeting between the Taoiseach and the PM was a matter for later consideration. On Alton's latter point, he said that a degree of ^{Among} unanimity had worked well in the past as a means of safeguarding the lives of soldiers. Recalling the IRA's threat "to take power in Ireland", he said that the TV coverage had revealed the IRA in its true colours and that it was no coincidence that efforts had been made by the IRA to block this coverage.

7. Ken Maginnis spoke emotionally about the Gillian Johnston killing. The decision to allow the IRA to take control of events in West Belfast on Saturday had embittered Unionists. He noted, furthermore, that, while they may be precluded from firing shots over the coffins, the IRA could overcome this restriction by setting up shrines "around the corner" and mounting paramilitary displays there for the benefit of specially invited media. He denounced the remarks made by Fr. Raymond Murray. King

recalled his comments last Thursday about inflammatory remarks made at funerals. While he disapproved of paramilitary displays "around the corner", which were against the law, these were still markedly preferable to those at the graveside. Broadcasting authorities should, however, consider their responsibilities very carefully.

8. Jim Kilfedder raised the possibility of a Church excommunication of IRA terrorists, which might in consequence reduce their funerals to very modest affairs. He also asked whether King had raised at the Conference the Irish Government's decision to allow the plane from Gibraltar to land in Dublin, thereby prolonging the funerals involved. King replied that this had not been Dublin's wish but had been the choice of the families and of those trying to influence them. It had posed significant policing problems for the Irish Government as well.

9. William McCrea spoke in particularly emotional terms of the suffering of his constituents (and in the process criticised Hume for his contacts with Adams). King said he respected McCrea's deep emotions, although, of course, McCrea was not the only one to feel this way.

10. Seamus Mallon said that King's sensitivity at this difficult time had been much appreciated. As one who had publicly urged the Chief Constable not to allow a confrontational situation to develop at funerals, he felt that it would be absolutely wrong for the Chief Constable to be held responsible for a decision which Mallon believed, both at the time and now, to be right. He strongly urged the two Governments, using the structures they had set up, to seek a solution which would bring peace and stability. In response, King said that the Chief Constable was not a man to shirk responsibility and that he (King) stood behind the decisions taken by the Chief Constable.

11. Clive Soley expressed strong personal support for King at the present time. The problems could only be tackled by the closest possible cooperation between London and Dublin. The UK Government's response to paramilitary organisations, however, should be one which would protect democratic institutions and the rule of law.