

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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# Northern Ireland Office

## Press Notice

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Stormont Castle, Belfast  
18 November 1974

The following is the text of a written reply by the Secretary of State, Mr Merlyn Rees MP, to a question in Parliament about prisons in Northern Ireland.

Over the past 5 years the prison population in Northern Ireland has increased almost five-fold to a current total of 2,756. This includes 1,680 convicted prisoners, of whom 1,054 at present have a special category status; it also includes 524 remand prisoners, 85 borstal trainees and 528 detainees.

Since the Cunningham Report in December 1971 a search has been going on to find a site for a new permanent high security prison. Sixteen sites have been examined and I am at present advised that the most suitable one is on a disused air field at Maghaberry, Co Antrim.

The initial planned building programme will take 4-5 years to complete; it will provide cell accommodation for 400-450 male convicted prisoners and there will also be a separate new women's prison and young offenders' centre for girls between 16 and 21. The site will be large enough for future extension if necessary.

The Cunningham Report recommended that the new prison should replace the Crumlin Road Prison, Belfast, but it is essential to have sufficient accommodation for remand prisoners close to the courts and the latter prison will therefore continue to serve this purpose.

It is also my aim to provide on the same site as the high security prison advance accommodation to which some of the convicted prisoners can be redeployed from the Maze as soon as possible. This new accommodation will be in cell form and will have a capacity of 700. It is planned for occupation in the early part of 1976.

Action will be put in hand very shortly to seek to acquire Maghaberry site, including if necessary steps with a view to compulsory acquisition. In any event a public enquiry will be held and a report issued as a result of the enquiry will be carefully considered.

Plans have already been made for the completion during 1975 of a new wing at Armagh women's prison. Closed borstal accommodation will be ready during 1976 at Woburn, Millisle; and work has already started on a Young Offenders' Centre for 300 males at Hydebankwood, near Belfast, which is due for completion in 1977.