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STATEMENT by AIREY NEAVE, M.P., CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN ON
NORTHERN IRELAND

Our three-day talks have convinced us that the Conservative Opposition has been fully justified in its criticism of the Government's security policy in Northern Ireland.

We have found widespread agreement that the time is ripe for new moves against terrorism. Present opportunities must not be lost. The government of the Republic have shown an exemplary sense of urgency by recalling Parliament to strengthen anti-terrorist laws.

In the United Kingdom the responsibility for such measures lies with the British Government whose duty is to protect Northern Ireland from the reign of terror.

But what have the government done? They have rejected Opposition proposals based on the Gardiner report to simplify the laws against terrorism and incitement. They have failed to end the scandal of arch-terrorists remaining at large although their identity and whereabouts are well-known to the Security Forces. Despite the outstanding efforts of the Army and police, the greatest obstacle to successful action is the failure of the government to amend the rules of evidence in terrorist cases in Northern Ireland.

The Security Forces are therefore subject to serious frustration in being unable to obtain the conviction of leading terrorists.

The government must take immediate steps to shift the burden of proof to those accused of certain terrorist offences in Northern Ireland.

The alternatives are to return to the abandoned policy of detention or accept a worsening level of violence. 1976, on present statistics, could be as bad as any year since the troubles began. But it could mark the beginning of the end of terrorism if the Government demonstrates the leadership and political will that the present dangerous and messy situation demands.