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OIFIG AN AIRE GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2
DUBLIN 2

CONFIDENTIAL

19 December, 1977

Mr. Jack Lynch T.D.
Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Dublin 2.

OIFIG AN AIRE GNÓTHAÍ
22 NLG 1977

① K. W. Kelly 3/11/78
To see me. The Taoiseach
knows to remain to the British
Army (K. W. Kelly) on
the letter return from India
② Chon → R/S 11/1/78
R/S 3/11/78

Dear Taoiseach

As you know, Con Murphy has sent me copies of his recent correspondence with you concerning the GAA grounds at Crossmaglen. I thought you might wish to have the following brief summary of the developments in this regard over the past few years.

Following a deterioration of the local security situation, including the murder of two members of the RUC, British troops moved into the RUC station in Crossmaglen in 1970. The station backs onto the GAA grounds and, again because of the security situation, access has been almost exclusively by helicopter. In July 1974, the British authorities compulsorily acquired part of the GAA grounds adjoining the station and built a helicopter landing-pad on it. Despite strong representations at the time, the British refused to rescind the order, pointing out that it was necessary to have a safe landing area for Army helicopters delivering supplies to the RUC station.

In November 1976, Seán Ó Síocháin made representations to my predecessor regarding a further proposed encroachment of the GAA grounds, as well as disturbance caused by British Army activities in the area and damage to GAA property. The matter was taken up with the British authorities by the Embassy in London, who referred to the activities of the British Army in the area, as outlined by Seán Ó Síocháin, and pointed to the difficulties created by such activities. On the question of requisitioning further GAA property, it was urged that the needs of the British Army in the area should be met in some alternative manner which did not involve further difficulties for the GAA.



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In their reply, the British authorities stated that the facts about the requirements of their security forces in the area were set out in the Northern Ireland Office statement of 8 December 1976 (copy attached). They also gave us assurances that there was absolutely no intention of dispossessing club members of their pitch nor of restricting in any way the access which they enjoyed. With regard to a possible alternative site suggested by the GAA, the British stated that this was an industrial site owned by the Department of Commerce and being developed with help from the Local Enterprise Development Unit. A factory employing 29 persons had already opened on the site and the vacant land was earmarked for industrial expansion. They added that, even if it were available and desirable to use it for security rather than industrial purposes, the land would be of no use for Army purposes as it was separate from the base.

The British authorities accepted that it was unfortunately the case that some interference had taken place as a result of helicopter landings at Crossmaglen and assured the Embassy that every effort would be made to minimise the disturbance. They added that any damage to the playing area was very much regretted and that compensation could be sought.

The above information was conveyed to Seán Ó Síocháin by letter on 23 December 1976 and it was suggested to him that the matter should be pursued at local level on the basis of the assurances given by the British authorities. He was also asked to keep in touch regarding future developments so that the matter might be pursued further with the British if the assurances given to us were not honoured or if discussions at local level did not yield satisfactory results. On 11 March 1977 a letter in similar terms was sent to Mr. Ó Síocháin but until Con Murphy's recent correspondence with you, there had been no indication of the results of any local discussions or related developments based on the British assurances at that time.

At this stage, we must obviously await the British response to your raising the matter at Brussels with the Prime Minister but I thought it might be useful for you to have the above background information in case Con Murphy is in touch with you again. In particular, it may be necessary to ask him for much



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more specific information in relation e.g. to the efforts made locally by the GAA to obtain compensation, to the "constant damage and deliberate destruction of the [GAA] property", to the "harassment and interference with the members of the GAA", to the turning away of a juvenile football team from the field, etc. The assurances obtained in December 1976 were very specific and if they are not being honoured, it would be desirable to have from the GAA the detailed information required to have further discussions with the British.

Yours sincerely

Michael O'Kennedy