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ON BEHALF OF

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Statement by the Minister for Justice.

A few days ago, this country had inflicted on it another grievous wound through the cold-blooded murder of an honoured visitor, Lord Mountbatten, and members of his family and of a young boy who acted as boatman.

The massive sense of revulsion which this deed has generated has been well articulated by the Government, by other political leaders, by representatives of various groups in our society, and in newspaper editorials.

Difficult as the situation is already, we now have the spectacle of Mr. John Taylor, a fellow-Irishman from the North, an elected member of the European Parliament and a former Stormont Minister, publicly engaging in what is in fact plain incitement to further mass-murder.

I do not blame Mr. Taylor for being angry - he is no more angry than the Government. I would not blame him even for exaggeration or for some attempts to find scapegoats when things go seriously wrong in his own area. But nothing can excuse what in fact he has said.

Mr. Taylor accuses the Government of failing to uphold civilised standards of security, co-operation and extradition which apply elsewhere throughout Europe. He tries to convey the impression that the tragic deaths of 20 British soldiers near Warrenpoint were the result of activity directed from here. Mr. Taylor has no evidence to support this. The explosions occurred in Northern Ireland and any attempt to imply that the crime was committed by people from the South is reckless speculation. The RUC have confirmed to the Gardai that they have no evidence to support any suggestion that the soldiers were fired on from the South when the explosions occurred. The Border is used at times by para-military groups but reasonable and informed people realise that it is no more possible for us to seal off our side than for the security forces in the North to seal off their side.

Referring to extradition, Mr. Taylor speaks of a European Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism. Mr. Taylor should know that what he is saying about that is, in all material respects, totally misleading. The Convention in question has been signed by most European countries but, with many of the countries who signed it, there is so much by way of qualification that its acceptance on the same basis by us would be meaningless in the context of Northern Ireland. Thus, France, Germany, Belgium and Denmark do not extradite their own nationals at all, whether the offence be political or non-political. Sweden, Italy, Norway and Portugal entered reservations as to their right not to extradite for political offences. So we immediately have a situation where, even in relation to this European Convention, at least eight continental countries are not undertaking to allow extradition in circumstances similar to ours. Putting it another way, if we were to sign the European Convention subject to the qualifications that are widespread in Europe, we would not be making an iota of a contribution to the suppression of violence in the North.

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Mr. Taylor also says that the murderers of Mr. Airey Neave are now commonly known to be living freely in Dublin. He means, of course, suspects for the murder. Obviously he intends his constituents to believe that the Government here are shielding such people and that they could be extradited if we had a suitable extradition treaty. That outrageous suggestion is without a shadow of foundation. One could equally say that, if there are prime suspects for murder living freely in Dublin, there are prime suspects for murder living freely in Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland and that the R.U.C. can do nothing about it simply because they have no evidence to produce in Court. Despite what Mr. Taylor tries to convey, if either the R.U.C. or the British police have any legal evidence on which anybody living in Dublin could be charged with the murder of Mr. Neave the suspects will be dealt with under our law as it stands. On the other hand, if they have no evidence, Mr. Taylor might explain how there could be extradition of such people even if there were a new extradition treaty that included political offences. Extradition is to enable people to be charged in Court, not to enable them to be interrogated in the hope of getting evidence.

Of the several cold-blooded misrepresentations which Mr. Taylor has perpetrated, perhaps the worst - in the sense of being the most far reaching - is his assertion that the Government have failed to uphold civilised standards of security. Mr. Taylor is a former Stormont Minister. He must know that successive Irish Governments, irrespective of Party, deploy relatively far more resources than the British Government do in combatting I.R.A. activities. This is not in any way to criticise the British Government whose own security investment has been massive, even if relatively less than ours. Our investment in those security measures represents a major drain on the Exchequer and, if Mr. Taylor's strictures had any basis, we would easily find other and urgent uses for the money.

Having said all that, I would like to take the opportunity to assure the people in Northern Ireland - and I include, in particular, those who are likely to be amongst Mr. Taylor's political supporters - that the Government will not allow Mr. Taylor's reckless provocation to interfere in any way with our total commitment and determination to do everything to combat I.R.A. and other para-military violence. I ask all those people who are in any way affected by that violence to keep in mind that the police force of Northern Ireland, the R.U.C., have both publicly and privately made it clear that they recognise the major contribution to security that is being made by the Garda Siochana. We intend to continue to maintain that contribution and to improve it where possible. We see this as a basic duty. We would expect, at least, that the fact that we are doing this would be recognised. Certainly, the only people likely to gain from Mr. Taylor's provocations are the very people whom he professes to want to see suppressed, namely the I.R.A. - apart of course from other sinister elements who might hope to gain power of some kind if our society North and South could be reduced to chaos.

I have spoken bluntly because I believe that, if circumstances ever required blunt speaking, it is now. We are in the shadow of a most appalling crime committed in our midst, a crime which should make all of us renew our determination to end violence and to insist that solutions must be sought in other ways. Instead, we have Mr. Taylor engaging in incitement to murder.

31st August, 1979.