

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2010/53/889
Creation Date(s):	18 January 1980
Extent and medium:	1 page
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
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18 January 1980

STATEMENT MADE IN HOUSE OF COMMONS TODAY BY RT HON HUMPHREY ATKINS MP,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.

"I will make a statement about the fatal bombing incident in Northern Ireland yesterday evening. Just before six o'clock yesterday evening there was an explosion followed by a fire on a Ballymena to Belfast train in the vicinity of Dunmurry.

The explosion occurred in a carriage immediately in front of the engine, which was at the rear of the train. As a result 3 people died and 5 others were injured and taken to hospital. The bodies of those who died are so badly charred that their identity can only be established by a process of elimination, and this is in hand. Of the injured, 3 were seriously burned and were detained in hospital. The explosive device used is believed to be of the blast incendiary type, and police enquiries into the incident are continuing. Up to the present moment no individual terrorist organisation has claimed responsibility for the outrage. The possibility cannot be ruled out that the device exploded prematurely.

I am sure I carry the House with me in expressing my deep sympathy with those innocent members of the public who were injured, and with the relatives of those who died. The incidents of the last three days have yet again brought home the utter callousness of the terrorists in their continued attempts to destroy the life of the Province. Last night's brutal murders and the attempted murder of many others have made this clear.

But despite the terrorists' efforts the bravery and dedication to duty of the people of Northern Ireland remains unshaken. My hon friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State who visited the scene of last night's fatal incident has told me of the courage of the staff of the Northern Ireland Railways who dealt with two devices on two other trains which did not explode.

The people of Northern Ireland are determined not to give in to such cowardly attempts to intimidate them. Her Majesty's Government is equally determined to give them the fullest possible security backing."