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Message from the Taoiseach, Mr. Charles J. Haughey, T.D.,
to Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher.

The hunger strikes in the Maze Prison are a continuing source of tension, difficulty and danger. The situation is a cause of deep and serious concern for the Irish Government.

The hunger strikes and the deaths are having, inter alia, the following results:-

- (1) They have generated an entirely new level of support for the IRA among the nationalist community in Northern Ireland.
- (2) They have already had a substantial impact on political life in the Republic of Ireland as the election of two of the hunger strikers and the relatively large vote for other hunger strike candidates in the recent General Election indicates. Future developments in this area are at present

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impossible to predict but even at present from the point of view of law and order and the 7security of the State 7, the situation is a cause of grave anxiety.

(3) While it is not for us to judge the real situation, it would seem that Great Britain is incurring some measure of damage to her standing on the international scene. There is clearly a widespread upsurge of support for the IRA around the world and particularly in the United States. The implications of this for the flow of material support for violence and also for our 7security measures North and South are very serious.

(4) The prospect of pursuing increasingly fruitful Anglo-Irish relations is certainly not enhanced.

From our point of view, we must emphasise that the finding of a solution to the situation is of fundamental and far-reaching importance at present.

While it is impossible to judge with certainty, there are some indications that the present may offer some hope that a way forward can be found. There are circumstances which are unlikely to recur. It seems improbable that any similar respite will offer if the deaths begin again.

Your Government has expressed readiness to keep all aspects of prison conditions under review, in the context of your

commitment to a humanitarian regime. I know and appreciate your readiness to consider any further suggestions by the European Commission of Human Rights. Unfortunately, my understanding is that the pace at which the body's work is proceeding means that it is unlikely to be of any assistance during the present respite.

An approach on the lines we worked out in Dublin before Christmas might suit, that is, a straightforward and clear exposition of what is on offer. The substance might relate to further adjustments that might be made throughout the Northern Ireland prison system which would not constitute the grant of political status, or impair the authorities' control of the prisons. The recent suggestions by the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace may provide a basis for progress.

I appreciate that you may be concerned that a fresh initiative will not end the hunger strike and that those involved will simply exploit the situation to further their campaign. There can, of course, be no certainty about the response. Our assessment is that nevertheless, the balance of advantage is strongly in favour of another initiative. If the attempt is not made, further deaths of hunger strikers will be exploited in IRA propaganda to increase their support. This accession of support is likely far to exceed what would flow to them if changes were made in the prison rules. Even if the attempt were unsuccessful, it could moderate the flow of support and would also have favourable effects on opinion in the

Republic and throughout the world. It would also be of benefit for the fruitful development of relationships within these islands which I continue to hope can flow from the outcome of our meeting last December.

It goes without saying, of course, that we are ready to help in every way possible, in finding an acceptable solution.