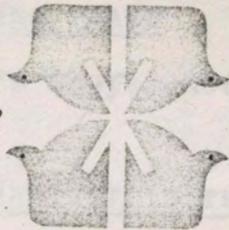


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TEXT OF STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE IRISH COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE  
AND PEACE

ON THE HUNGER STRIKE AND THE PROTEST IN THE MAZE PRISON

NORTHERN IRELAND

Issued Wednesday 8th July, 1981, at 17.00 hours in Belfast

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IRISH COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

- *A Commission of the Irish Bishop's Conference*

STATEMENT ON THE HUNGER STRIKE AND THE PROTEST IN THE MAZE  
PRISON NORTHERN IRELAND

Issued by the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, Wednesday  
8th July, 1981, at 17.00 hours, in Belfast

Following the death of Joe McDonnell, which the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace learned of this morning with profound sorrow, we now wish to clarify certain points in a spirit of extreme urgency in the hope that a resolution at the Maze Prison can still be achieved, without further loss of life.

On Monday last, July 6th, 1981, the Commission prepared a statement for publication. At this stage the Commission had met Mr. Michael Alison, M.P., on four occasions for a total of more than 16 hours. The statement prepared on July 6th is issued herewith and should be read as part of this statement.

The Commission met Mr. Alison on the evening of Monday, July 6th 1981, and produced to him a copy of our statement. The statement contained a true summary of the essential points of prison reform that had emerged in our discussions. We informed him that the hunger strikers considered the points to be the formation of a resolution of the hunger strike, provided that they received satisfactory clarification of detail and confirmation by an official of the N.I.O. to them personally of the commitment of the British Government to act according to the spirit and the letter of our statement.

We strongly emphasised to the Minister of State the importance of immediate action in sending an official of the Northern Ireland Office to the hunger strikers, particularly in view of the imminent death of Joe McDonnell. The Minister accepted that our statement reflected a true picture of what he had indicated to us to be the position of the British Government, ~~says~~ in two respects.

He stated that he did not accept the phrase "The British Government would be under a moral obligation" and he suggested that it should read "in the considered view of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, the British Government would be under a moral obligation". This form of words we accept to be correct. He also stated that, apart from the clothing reform, which he accepted as

being an absolute commitment, his understanding was that the specific details of the other reforms were meant to be illustrative only. This understanding we did not accept and we stand over our statement in full, save insofar as mentioned above.

By the conclusion of our message the Minister accepted our urgings to the point at which he proposed that one of his officials be sent with a governor of the Maze Prison to the prisoners by mid-morning at the latest on the following morning, July 7th, 1981, as it was essential that clarification of the British Government position be made so that there could be no doubts in the minds of the prisoners.

He agreed that clarification should be made in the spirit of our discussion and in the light of Mr. Atkin's statement and his (Mr. Alison's) letter of Tuesday, June 30th. It was also agreed that the negative as well as the positive side would have to be put to the prisoners.

Given the assurance, we agreed to suspend the publication of our detailed statement. We were allowed to telephone the prison chaplain from Stormont Castle to ask him to convey to the hunger strikers that we would not be going in to see them on Monday night. It was by then 10.15 p.m.

We asked the chaplain also to inform them to expect an N.I.O. official in the morning. The chaplain later that night confirmed to the ICJP that he had been able to convey the message to the six hunger strikers in the hospital.

At 11.40 a.m., yesterday, Tuesday, July 7th, we were asked by the N.I.O. to come to Stormont Castle to see them. In response to a query from the Commission we were told that no-one had yet been from the N.I.O. to the prison.

We declined to see the British Government again until their official had been into the prisoners, and asked for an assurance that a visit would take place immediately. Otherwise we would make public the commitment given. It was for this reason the press were called to this hotel for 1.00 p.m. yesterday (Tuesday). Just before our press conference we were informed that an official would go in that afternoon.

We were told at 4.00 p.m. that no-one had yet gone in to the prison, but that someone would be going in and that a document of clarifications was still being drafted.

By 5.30 p.m. it became clear to us that the British Government's intention was to send in the document but no officials.

We, the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, took the view that suspicion was a central difficulty in arriving at a solution and that the prisoners' suspicions would be further heightened by the absence of an N.I.O. official, especially since one had been expected, and that the result could perhaps be the rejection of any document.

We communicated this once more by phone to Mr. Alison himself at 5.55 p.m. yesterday and yet again at 7.15 p.m. At 8.50 p.m. we were told that an N.I.O. official would go in to see the prisoners with the prison governor that evening. This later was explained to mean an N.I.O. official to be in attendance while a prison governor read out the written document.

At 10.00 p.m. Mr. Alison personally telephoned the Commission to say that there would be no-one going in that night. He said that the official would be going in the following morning (i.e. this morning) but that the delay would be to the prisoners' benefit. The commission members expressed alarm at this development. We were also assured of the condition of Joe McDonnell.

We heard this morning that Joe McDonnell has died. The N.I.O. informed us that at about 6.30 a.m. an official of the N.I.O. was on his way to the Maze prison, with a statement which was to be read to the hunger-strikers by a prison governor in the presence of an N.I.O. official.

We have received a copy of the statement we believe to have been read to the prisoners.

We cannot regard it as a serious attempt to seek a resolution, in the light of the discussions we had and of the position clarified to us by the Minister.

We believe that Mr. Alison himself acted at all times in good faith.

Our commitment is to tell the truth in this matter. Our telling of the truth can in no way be interpreted, in fact it would be morally wrong to interpret it, as an excuse for hatred or violence. We repeat with even greater emphasis our call for a rejection of violence as in our statement of June 3rd.

We have set out the truth in an endeavour to achieve a solution, and we believe a solution is still possible without further loss of life if the truth is honoured.

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On June 12, 1968, the Commission received a statement from the British Government that it was not possible to disclose the names of the individuals who had been arrested in Belfast, and that the names of the individuals who had been arrested in London would not be disclosed.

That disclosure is necessary in order to ensure that the names of the individuals who have been arrested in Belfast and London are disclosed, and that the names of the individuals who have been arrested in Belfast and London are disclosed.

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Enclosed for the Commission are the names of the individuals who have been arrested in Belfast and London, and that the names of the individuals who have been arrested in Belfast and London are disclosed, and that the names of the individuals who have been arrested in Belfast and London are disclosed.

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