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Sentence Review

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CA

TERRORIST PRISONERS: DRAFT OF A POSSIBLE STATEMENT
FOLLOWING AN ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

The conclusion of this agreement has sparked interest in whether it could lead to the earlier release of prisoners who have committed terrorist offences.

The agreement in itself cannot do that. Such prisoners who are serving determinate sentences are already eligible for remission of 50% of their sentences provided that they are not of bad conduct while in prison; and the release on licence of life sentence prisoners must continue to be subject to the considerations set out in the memorandum "Life Sentence Prisoners in Northern Ireland" which is available from the Northern Ireland Office. In particular, the term served must reflect the gravity of the offence, and the need to protect the public from the risk of a repetition of it or from some other crime of violence must remain an ^{control} overriding consideration.

Nevertheless, it is the profound hope of both the UK and Irish Governments that the agreement will foster reconciliation between the communities in Northern Ireland, and will lead to a ^{major} real and sustained reduction in the level of violence. If that were to happen, the risk of released prisoners reverting to paramilitary activity would be diminished, and this would be a factor of which full account would be taken, alongside other considerations, in deciding whether the release of prisoners could be accelerated.