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In reply to a Press query from Ella Shanahan of the Irish Times about a letter from the then Ambassador Donlon to Congressman Hamilton Fish on 6.11.1979 the Government Press Secretary, after consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs, and with their authority, said:

"If the Irish Embassy in Washington had done anything it would have been on instructions from Dublin. Fianna Fail were in Government at the time."

He did not make any statement referring to Deputy Michael O'Kennedy as having been Minister for Foreign Affairs in November 1979. That additional item of information was added by the newspaper after the quotation from the Press Secretary.

Ambassador Donlon's letter to Congressman Hamilton Fish did not make representations to him about the 'Birmingham Six', and Ambassador Donlon made that clear in a letter of 10th January, 1980 to Fr. Raymond Murray, in which he said "at no stage have I made representations to Congressman Fish in the matter of the six Irishmen convicted of the Birmingham bombings in 1974". His letter of 11th November 1979 was written in pursuance of a policy enunciated by the then Taoiseach, Mr. Jack Lynch, in a letter to Congressman Biaggi of 17th February, 1978. The policy was one of opposing the Irish National Caucus, which in this letter the then Taoiseach described "closely associated

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with the cause of violence in Northern Ireland", and which his successor as Taoiseach, the Leader of the Opposition, Deputy Haughey, referred to in a speech on 27th July, 1980 in Cork in the following terms:

"The evidence available to us also of the associations that exist between NORAID and the Irish National Caucus casts grave suspicions on the latter organisation".

Subsequent to these events, on 11th January, 1980 the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, in the Government led by Deputy Haughey, that is Deputy Brian Lenihan, wrote to Fr. Murray and Fr. Faul in the following terms: I quote the letter in full.

Dear Father Murray and Father Faul,

I have received your letter and enclosure of 28 December last concerning your representations to the Ambassador in Washington. The Ambassador is replying directly to the letter addressed to him by you and Fr. Brady.

I and the Government have full confidence in Ambassador Donlon and his staff. His conversations with Congressman Fish have not touched on the case of those convicted of the Birmingham bombings of 1974. They have been about the Congressman's interest in promoting contacts between elected representatives from both parts of Ireland and US elected representatives".

In the light of the facts as I have set them out above, including the letter from Deputy Lenihan as Minister for Foreign Affairs which I have just read, I submit to the House that the Government Press Secretary is totally justified in indicating to the Press that any action taken by the Irish Embassy in Washington in this matter in November 1979 was fully authorised and completely in accord with established Government policy. I trust that Deputy O'Kennedy, who erroneously came to believe that he was in some way being unfairly singled out, will now have the generosity to recognise this publicly.

I should like to add, a Ceann Comhairle, that the Government and I recognise that Father Murray and, of course, Father Faul who has worked closely with Father Murray in this and many other instances of human concern, have been motivated by a sincere concern for the protection of human rights.

Finally, I should tell the House that following the most recent representations by the Government, which follow a series of other representations by successive Governments that were initiated when I was Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1976, has been informed by the British Government that the Home Secretary, who has been presented with new material about the case of the Birmingham Six, is considering very carefully whether it would be appropriate to refer the case to the Court of Appeal, and that the matter is being dealt with very urgently.