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To HQ
or O Tuathail

From Belfast
From O Ceallaigh

McKENNA FUNERAL

S20876

Lillis yesterday conveyed to the British side the Tánaiste's concern about the heavy presence of the security forces at the McKenna funeral. He also conveyed the Tánaiste's concern about the use of plastic bullets in a confined space and sought information as to what happened.

In conveying our concern we asked the other side if they could give us a report indicating their view of events, as well as their views on the numbers of the security forces present yesterday relative to the Marley funeral. We have reminded the British that the Tánaiste has to take PQs today, including one on the Marley funeral, and that it would be very helpful if we could have replies to our queries as soon as possible.

2473M

To HQ
For O Tuathail

From Belfast
From O Ceallaigh

20876

McKENNA FUNERAL

I understand from British side that funeral cortege, consisting of a crowd of 2-3,000 people, is making its way down the Falls towards Milltown Cemetery at present.

There was a clash between the police and mourners outside the Royal Victoria when three plastic bullets were fired by the police. One policeman has been injured. A Sinn Féin Councillor, Keenan, has been injured (it is not clear whether this has been as a result of a plastic bullet or otherwise) and has been taken to hospital.

We have been told that a report will be given to us as quickly as possible based on police information.

Local radio is reporting a considerably smaller police presence than at the Marley funeral.

2473M

To HQ
For O Tuathail

From Belfast
From O Ceallaigh

McKENNA FUNERAL

Further to my 464C the British have responded to the points we made to them about the McKenna funeral with the following views:

- The security forces were attacked by a gang of youths hurling concrete blocks, bricks and bottles. The British side believe that this was a clear premeditated and orchestrated attack on the security forces.
- The security forces responded and sought to disperse the stone-throwers. Eight plastic bullets were fired. The stone-throwers dispersed and the remainder of the funeral passed off quietly. I understand that it is normal practice for the Secretary of State to receive a report on the firing of each plastic bullet.
- We have been told that the security force numbers deployed yesterday were kept to the minimum consistent with maintaining public order. It seems to be clear from the TV pictures that the security force numbers were considerably less than at the Marley funeral and that the police maintained a more discreet distance on this occasion.
- We have been informed that the Northern Ireland Office has come under very considerable pressure from the press in response to the coverage in this morning's Irish Times of the Tánaiste's concern about yesterday's events. For their part the NIO are confirming to journalists that the concern of the Tánaiste was conveyed to them as was also his sympathy for the injured policeman. They had asked if they could say the latter and following a conversation with O'Donovan I agreed that they could use it.

The policeman, who has a head wound, is still detained in hospital and has been described as comfortable.

To HQ
Mr O Tuathail

From Belfast
From O Ceallaigh

The British side of the Secretariat have been instructed by the Secretary of State to say that he is "very concerned" with this morning's Irish Times report headed "the Tánaiste voices concern at funeral scenes". King has asked the British side to tell us that if the media is briefed in this way it "makes his life impossible".

There are two words in particular which caused King concern. Firstly the article reports that the "Department of Foreign Affairs had expected that the decision by the two Ministers would be implemented by the RUC". This reference, in addition to the earlier use of the word "conclusion", gives the impression that the conference is a decision-making body and that it is concerned with matters which are proper to the operational role of the police.

I responded by saying that newspaper articles and reports do not always accurately reflect briefings. They cannot always be seen as an accurate statement of Government policy or of the views of the Government. This was accepted. My interlocutor added that King hoped that such words would not be used by the Tánaiste in Question Time today in the Dáil. (Because of the urgency of this message I have conveyed it by phone to Mr. O Tuathail).

2473M