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11 May, 1988.

Mr. Ray Bassett,
Anglo-Irish Division,
Department of Foreign Affairs.

Visit to Gerard Conlon, Guildford Four,
at Full Sutton Prison, York, on 10 May, 1988.

Dear Ray,

I visited Gerard Conlon for 1 1/2 hours at Full Sutton Prison, just outside York, on 10 May, 1988. He had been transferred there from Durham Prison where he had served 28 days "cooling off" period.

Conlon outlined what he saw as the reasons for his transfer from Long Lartin where he served 7 years of sentence and was quite happy with the conditions. Conlon said he was due a visit on 22 March 1988 but that when he arrived in the visiting area he saw a Category A prisoner by the name of Lupo who was an Aids sufferer having an open visit. He was

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asked to wait until that visit was over which he did. Conlon sought an interview with Governor Whitty on four occasions to protest that he was not allowed an open visit, while a known Aids sufferer was free from such restrictions. Conlon claims the Governor refused to see him which led him on 28 March to write to the Embassy outlining the circumstances and alleging discrimination. After submitting the letter to the censors, Conlon claims he was summoned to the Governor's office that afternoon and was told he would be transferred. He says some of the warders told him he had been "a naughty boy" to write to the Embassy with the complaint.

The Embassy did not receive the letter of 28 March and Conlon alleges it was, in effect, suppressed. He also alleges the letter was the reason he was transferred to the new prison at Full Sutton.

I told Conlon that we had been told by the Home Office that it had to fill the recently opened prison and that, as 50 of the 600 Category A prisoners were Irish, it was natural that one or two Irish prisoners should be transferred. I also said that this was the first time to my knowledge that letters to the Embassy from Irish prisoners had been apparently tampered with or suppressed. I confirmed to him however, that we had not received his letter of 28 March. Conlon clearly resented my putting these points to him since he was firmly convinced that his transfer to Full Sutton was a direct result of his having written to the Embassy. He emphasised that the last thing anyone in his position would want to do was to leave himself open to accusations of lying.

Conlon went on to mention that Bishop Cahal Daly of Down and Conor had visited him on 27 April and had promised to raise with the Home Office the question of his return to a prison in the South of England. This led him to his second major grievance - that his family, and particularly his mother, found it impossible to visit him in York. His mother had no relations in the city with whom she could overnight before visiting him (unlike London) quite apart from the difficulty, since the demise of the Belfast-Liverpool ferry, of travelling from Holyhead across England to York. Conlon said these visits from his mother and his sister were all he had and he asked the Embassy and the Government to do all they could to have him moved back to the South. I said I would take up the matter but emphasised that we could not guarantee a favourable result. Conlon said he understood we "were grafting away" on behalf of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six; he knew how things worked and he appreciated what was being done. I said that tactically it might go better for him if he conformed to prison regulations while we sought to have him transferred, (Conlon is currently in the segregation unit) but he refused to concede on this.

Conlon discussed progress in relation to the Guildford Four case. He was quite happy to have Robert Kee represent him at any meeting with the Taoiseach. He dismissed differences between Lily Hill and Errol Smalley as petty personality differences. He also said Paul Hill could not expect to "come out of this smelling of roses", he had to accept, as Conlon did, that their criminal activities (drug-taking and petty theft) would come out in the wash, but that should not detract from their innocence in the bombing charges. The problem was Hill had past proven links with the IRA which he could not shrug off. It was better that they should all tell the

whole truth, admit the lesser crimes and defend their innocence of the charge of bombing the pubs in Guildford and Woolich.

He was pessimistic about the outcome of the police investigation. He said Havers had been a "nobody" at the time of the original trial; he was now a former Lord Chancellor whom it was difficult if not impossible to discredit. Imbert and Donaldson had similarly risen through the ranks of their respective professions. Conlon felt that the Balcombe Street admissions despite the contradictions, had to hold water. The contradictions of Dowd's testimony could be explained by his disorientation after two and a half years in solitary. They had to be balanced against the contradictions inherent in the Guildford Four's confessions.

Regarding his own role, Conlon asked why had he hung around for 48 hours after being told Hill had been arrested by the police and why had he not fled to the Republic? Why had Paddy Armstrong called to a police station to make a complaint after supposedly planting bombs? It defied sense.

Conlon finished by saying he appreciated the visit. He said he hoped the Government and the Embassy would stick by the prisoners and, in his case, seek a transfer to the South of England immediately.

Yours sincerely,

Breifne O'Reilly
Breifne O'Reilly,
Third Secretary.

Comment.

There was some disquiet among Conlon's relations about his health. They can be reassured that he seemed as fit as usual, was eating normally and, although initially aggressive (as always!), he subsequently thawed and was quite friendly. He showed himself to be fully in command of his situation. I spoke to his brother-in-law in Belfast (Joe McKernan) and reassured him that Conlon was in good health.