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I share your concern for the young people of Northern Ireland and I regret very much that injuries have been sustained during the recent rioting. It is all the more distressing because those who are injured are rarely the instigators of the disturbances. Indeed young people have been encouraged to undertake actions whose risks and consequences they may not fully comprehend.

The Chief Constable has explained publicly that the baton round is not designed to kill or used with any intention to kill. The Police and the Army are accountable to the law for its use and there are procedures for dealing with cases where it is alleged that the Security Forces have not acted properly. The use of the baton round is strictly controlled by Police and Army regulations and incidents where there have been serious injuries or fatalities are thoroughly and meticulously investigated.

The use of baton rounds must be seen in the context of recent events in Northern Ireland. It has been used because - in the professional judgment of the Chief Constable and General Officer Commanding, which I support - it is the most effective means

of controlling the recent severe rioting that is consistent with the principle of using a minimum of force. Policemen and soldiers have been subjected to sustained and ferocious attack by petrol and acid bombs, blast bombs, bricks and other missiles which may kill or cause serious injury. These attacks have sometimes been used as cover for gunmen and once as cover for a terrorist preparing to mount a rocket attack in which one Constable was killed and another seriously injured. In such circumstances baton rounds are the best available alternative to the more severe methods which the security forces might otherwise be obliged to employ. Other methods of controlling riots have been considered but they would either endanger the Police or the rioters to a greater extent.

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