

Our Reference: PI 349/8

Northern Ireland Office
Dundonald House
BELFAST

Circular No 28/83

To all Governors

PRISONERS AND INMATES - ACCESS TO WESTMINSTER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBERS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

1. The purpose of this circular is to give guidance on the handling of requests from prisoners and inmates for access to Westminster Members of Parliament and vice-versa and supersedes and cancels circular No 2/83. In the remainder of this circular, all references to prisoners should be taken as applying to YOC inmates.
2. In general the aim should be to take a sympathetic approach to such requests. There is no wish to limit any prisoner's access to his elected representatives more than is necessary to maintain the security of establishments and to prevent undue disruption to their normal running.

Sinn Fein Westminster Members of Parliament and Assembly Members

3. (a) The Secretary of State has now decided to reduce the access to prisoners allowed to Sinn Fein Assembly Members and Sinn Fein Westminster Members of Parliament. The individuals named in Annex A to this circular are not to be allowed to make visits to prisons other than to visit a close relative as defined in Standing Order Sub Section 5A Order No 27. This does not affect ordinary visits which may be made by a Sinn Fein councillor.
- (b) Should a Sinn Fein Assembly Member or Westminster Member of Parliament request a visit to a particular prisoner or should the name of one of those listed in Annex A to this circular be included on a visiting permit the visit should be refused and Prison Regimes 1 (Policy) must be notified by telephoning [REDACTED]

Letters to and from Westminster Members of Parliament and Assembly Members

4. Prisoners may write letters to and receive letters from any Westminster Member of Parliament or from any or all of their Assembly Members, including Sinn Fein representatives. Such letters will count against the prisoner's letter entitlement (see Circular 11/78 amending Circular 8/76).

Requests by a prisoner for a visit from Assembly Members for the prisoner's constituency or Westminster Member of Parliament

5. (a) The procedure for a visit from an Assembly Member will be the same as for a prisoner's request for a visit by a Westminster Member of Parliament. Thus, a prisoner must submit a petition asking for permission to have a visit from any Westminster Member of Parliament or from named Assembly Members for the constituency in which his family resides or in which the prisoner last resided. Such visits will not count towards the prisoner's ordinary allocation of statutory and privilege visits.

Requests by a prisoner for a visit from Assembly Members for other constituencies

- (b) If a prisoner wishes to see an Assembly Member other than from his own constituency he must name the Member on a visiting permit and the visit will count against his normal visits allowance. The Member should normally be allowed to visit the prisoner unless there is exceptionally some reason under the ordinary rules relating to visits and visitors for excluding him.
- (c) If a prisoner includes on a visiting permit a Sinn Fein Assembly Member or MP the permit should be returned to the prisoner. He should be informed that the visit will not take place and he may substitute another name if he wishes.

Requests by Westminster Members of Parliament or Assembly Members other than Sinn Fein to visit a constituent

- (d) All such requests should be referred immediately to the Private Office at Stormont Castle or, at weekends, to the Duty Officer. The purpose of this is to enable the Private Office to keep a note of such requests and to allow Headquarters to be advised of the reason for the request. Governors should not at that stage begin to organise the visit. Before the visit is agreed and organised, Governors will of course be consulted and the visit arranged at a time suitable both to the establishment and the Member.

Procedure for the conduct of visits

- 6. (a) Westminster Members of Parliament and Assembly Members visiting prisoners should be treated with due courtesy at all times.
- (b) A visit by a Member of Parliament to any prisoner or by an Assembly Member to one of his constituents, will take place in one of the rooms set aside for legal visits.
- (c) A visit should take place within sight, but not within hearing of prison staff, unless the member or the inmate so requests, or the Governor so requires for reasons of security.
- (d) A visit by an Assembly Member to a prisoner who is not his constituent (see 5(b) above) will take place in the normal visits area.

General Interest Visits

- 7. (a) The practice of allowing Westminster Members of Parliament to make annual "general interest visits" to each of the Northern Ireland prison establishments has been extended to representative groups of the political parties (other than Sinn Fein) who have been elected to the NI Assembly.
- (b) General interest visits by Assembly Members will be subject to the same criteria as at present are applied to visits granted to Westminster Members of Parliament, namely:-
 - (i) Each political party elected to the Assembly (other than Sinn Fein) will be allowed one general interest visit per year to each establishment.

- (ii) As far as possible the visiting group should be the "official" representatives of the party concerned and be led, or at least approved, by the party leader.
 - (iii) The visiting group should not normally exceed 4 in number.
 - (iv) The time of the visits will be arranged in advance with the Governor concerned, by telephone in the first instance, followed up in writing by Prison Regimes 2 if there is time. You will have discretion to recommend postponement of such visits to the Department if you consider there is a good reason for doing so.
 - (v) General interest visits should not be directly related to particular incidents; the purpose of the visit is to allow the Members to see around the establishment as a whole.
- (c) To try to avoid abuse of the facilities for general interest visits the Governor should, in his introductory talk with visiting Westminster Members of Parliament or Assembly Members make it clear that while there is no objection to their having a few words with individual prisoners as they pass through the establishment, they should not seek to have a prolonged conversation with any prisoner or to make any kind of address to a group.
 - (d) Any difficulty arising out of a general interest visit should be reported to Headquarters immediately, especially if the Governor has found it necessary to take steps to terminate the visit.
 - (e) A brief written report should be forwarded to Prison Regimes 2 after any general interest visit by Westminster Members of Parliament or Assembly Members has taken place.
8. Queries regarding this circular should be addressed to either [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

S C JACKSON
Prison Regimes Division

23 June 1983

Circular No 28/83

ANNEX A

LIST OF SINN FEIN ASSEMBLY MEMBERS AT 22 JUNE 1983

Gerard Adams MP, [REDACTED] (Belfast West)

Owen Carron, [REDACTED] (Fermanagh-South Tyrone)

James McAllister, [REDACTED] (Armagh)

James Martin McGuinness, [REDACTED] (Londonderry)

Daniel Gerard Morrison, [REDACTED] (Mid-Ulster)

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