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NORTHERN IRELAND INFORMATION SERVICE

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REID ANNOUNCES INDEPENDENT MONITOR OF VIOLENCE

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Dr John Reid today announced arrangements for independent monitoring of the level of violence in Northern Ireland and the nature of paramilitary involvement in it.

"Nearly four and a half years after the Belfast Agreement the level of violence including that committed by paramilitaries in Northern Ireland remains a matter of serious concern," he said.

"As I made clear on 24 July in the House of Commons it will help the public to have more information. Indeed, the public have a right to know what is going on.

"Since my statement in July I have consulted widely about the way in which this information might be provided. I have received a number of helpful suggestions and heard a range of views. I am clear that periodic reports setting out from an independent perspective just what is happening can only assist in bringing further pressure to bear on those responsible.

"I have now concluded, therefore, that it would be appropriate to put in place arrangements for an independent monitoring of the level of violence in Northern Ireland and the nature of paramilitary involvement in it.

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"This task won't be easy. But I am clear that we need someone who will be focused on the very practical task of bringing greater transparency to the pattern of violence and the involvement of both loyalist and republican paramilitary organisations in it. Much information is already in the public domain, but the monitor will be able to bring it together in an accessible form, consulting the police and others as he judges fit.

"I shall be considering further who might be appointed to this important role and I hope to be able to make an announcement about that and the formal terms of reference shortly.

"The monitor will not solve the problem of paramilitary violence, nor will he relieve me of the obligation to review all the available information in judging whether each paramilitary organisation is maintaining a ceasefire. But I do believe that this new mechanism will help to create a greater sense of openness and reinforce the transition to a normal democratic society."

Ends