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Minister of State

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
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SW1P 4QE

Lord Alderdice
55 Knock Road
Belfast
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4 December 1997

Dear John

I am writing to you to inform you that the Government is proceeding with legislation aimed at making policing in Northern Ireland more efficient, effective, accountable and acceptable. As the Secretary of State said publicly when she first arrived in Northern Ireland, and as the Government has affirmed on many occasions since, we attach great importance to ensuring that the policing service delivered to all the people of Northern Ireland is of the highest standard. The passing of the proposals contained in this Bill into law will be a major step in ensuring we maintain these standards.

The draft Bill introduces changes to the legislative structures governing policing in Northern Ireland, reforming the relationship between the Secretary of State, the Chief Constable and the Police Authority, with a view to enhancing efficiency, effectiveness and accountability. It also implements changes to the police complaints system, appointing an independent Police Ombudsman, who can investigate complaints against the police, including complaints of a criminal nature. It consolidates, with some amendments, Northern Ireland policing legislation with the exception of the police and criminal evidence provisions, and abolishes the present RUC Oath of Office, replacing it with a declaration of office along the lines of that used in Scotland.

The Bill will be introduced to Parliament tomorrow. It will be published on introduction, and I have instructed my officials to distribute copies as soon as they are available. I and my officials and Ministerial colleagues will also be seeking to provide face to face briefings on the Bill to interested parties in the weeks ahead.

I am confident this Bill will secure real improvements to the policing service in Northern Ireland, that will be of benefit to the whole community here.

Yours Aye
Adam

ADAM INGRAM JP MP
Minister of State