

PRESIDENT ROBINSON'S VISIT: PRESS LINES

Line to take (not for use until President is in Northern Ireland)

President Robinson is not visiting Northern Ireland as the official guest, or at the invitation, of HMG. She is doing so in a private capacity. There is no question of the Government having approved her programme or any part of it on this occasion. That is her responsibility.

2. HMG will of course afford her, like any distinguished visitor to this country, such protection and courtesy as the situation requires.

Notes for Supplementaries (not for use until visit to West Belfast has ended)

1. Question: Did HMG approve President Robinson's visit to West Belfast?

Reply: The British Government was not invited to approve her programme as a whole, or this part of it.

2. Question: Did HMG advise against the kind of visit proposed to West Belfast?

Reply: Yes. The British Government made clear that it thought that the element of the visit would not be appropriate.

3. Question: Were HMG's views on the visit made known to the Irish Government?

Reply: Yes. We took steps to make clear that our doubts about aspects of this visit were fully understood at the highest level in the Irish Government.

4. Question: Is it wise for President Robinson to meet this set of community groups in West Belfast, some of whom appear to have close links with Sinn Fein?

Reply: We expressed our doubts about the wisdom of this, and made clear our concern that this would not be conducive to the maintenance and development of good community relations, a matter we believe close to President Robinson's own concerns.

5. Question: Is it HMG's understanding that the Irish Government approved the details of President Robinson's visit?

Reply: I would not wish to comment on that. That is the matter for the Irish authorities.