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IRELAND



Reference Code:	2009/135/572
Creation Date(s):	20 March 1979
Extent and medium:	1 page
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
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NIO/3/13

20 March 1979

FOR THE RECORD

THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT WAS MADE YESTERDAY (19 MARCH 1978) BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, THE RT HON ROY MASON MP, IT WAS GIVEN TO CITY OFFICES LAST NIGHT

On Friday the "Daily Telegraph" printed a report alleging that Government officials were spreading a story about Dr Irwin.

I said in the House that morning that I had checked that no official in the Northern Ireland Office had been responsible for this action which I condemn.

On Friday evening the Chief Constable stated in the Press that he understood that the reporter who signed the article was quite emphatic that his source was not the RUC. Nevertheless, in view of further allegations, the Chief Constable has announced and informed me that he has instituted an investigation into the origins of the stories. This investigation began on Saturday and will be pursued vigorously.

I repeat that, as I said on Friday, there is no trace at all of Northern Ireland Office involvement in spreading such stories and I utterly reject any allegation that I would condone such action. I have every confidence in my staff, and for other people, without producing any firm evidence to spread allegations that my office are organising a campaign to smear individuals is a smear itself.