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Closure of Cross-Border Roads - Position as of September 1980

1. Around half of all cross-border roads are at present closed. The majority of those closed are minor roads serving local needs. The British policy of closing cross-border roads has in the past provoked vigorous local opposition, leading in some cases to confrontations with the British Army. The last major road-closing programme was carried out by the British Army in the Autumn of 1975.

2. We are opposed to the policy of closing cross-border roads on the grounds that it is counter-productive and frequently ineffectual. The question has been frequently raised with the British authorities, whose attention has been drawn to the hardship and inconvenience caused to the local people by the closure policy. (Although we acknowledge that security considerations justify the closure of some roads, our opposition to the general policy of closures remains).

3. The area where road closures have had a significant effect are:-

(i) Kiltyclogher, Co. Leitrim: Five cross-border roads are closed in this area, with the result that local people wishing to travel to Northern Ireland are obliged to go via Blacklion (Co. Cavan) to the East, or via the area of Belleek to the West. Despite our representations, the British authorities hold out no hope of an early re-opening of the roads closed in the Kiltyclogher area.

(ii) Pettigo, Co. Donegal: The most important road for local people appears to be the concession road linking Pettigo and Belleek. The British authorities are adamant that this road will remain closed for the foreseeable future.

(iii) Clones Co. Monaghan: As a result of acts of terrorism this year in Co. Fermanagh the British authorities have closed some crossings along the border with Counties Cavan and Monaghan. This has caused considerable inconvenience to traders and other persons resident in the Clones area.

Of particular concern has been the crossing at Lackey Bridge closed in July which the British have said they intend to keep impassable. Their desire to do so has probably been increased by the killing of RUC Reservist Mr. Ernest Johnston nearby on 23 September 1980 by the PIRA.

4. In the House of Commons on 22 July, 1980, Mr. Alison Minister of State said "it is by no means an agreed operational advantage to close border crossings. The closure of crossings ties troops down in some circumstances. It is a fine balance and we take the advice of professional advisers".

Department of Foreign Affairs

7 October 1980