

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2012/59/1673
Creation Date(s):	[July 1982]
Extent and medium:	2 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Access Conditions:	Open
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PETITION TO THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS PRESENTED
BY HAROLD McCUSKER MP

UNITED KINGDOM RESPONSE

It is regrettably true that the people of Northern Ireland have in recent years suffered grievously from terrorism and that many people have been murdered. Out of a total population of about 1.5 million, 518 people have been murdered by terrorists in Northern Ireland since the beginning of 1977. Terrorism is a problem in many parts of the world and the United Kingdom like many other countries take a firm stand against its manifestations. The United Kingdom actively support action in international fora to prevent or obviate it and are parties to the existing international conventions.

The policy of Her Majesty's Government is that all possible action within the law should be taken to prevent terrorism and that, where terrorist outrages take place, those responsible should be arrested and brought to trial. The implementation of this policy is primarily the responsibility of the police, although as the law provides, they are supported where necessary by the army. The United Kingdom Government has provided a full range of resources and manpower so that this task can be conducted as vigorously and effectively as practicable.

It is the policy of the United Kingdom Government that all action to combat terrorism should be conducted within the law and that no action outside the law by those responsible for sustaining it - or by others - will be countenanced.

It follows that the operation of the law and of the security forces is directed against the terrorists and not against other members of the Community on whose behalf the terrorists sometimes claim to be operating. Those citizens of Northern Ireland who do not share the wish of the majority of the people there to remain part of the United Kingdom and who aspire to a united Ireland, are entirely free to pursue that aim provided they do so peacefully and within the law.

Indications of the effectiveness of action against terrorist crime are that 1266 have been convicted in the period of 1 June 1980 to 31 May 1982 of crimes of a terrorist character. Currently 1646 are serving terms of imprisonment having been tried, convicted and sentenced by the courts in respect of scheduled offences.

The United Kingdom Government's unrelenting efforts to eradicate terrorist crime will continue, but will be applied impartially, and irrespective of political or religious beliefs. The Government's aim is to create the conditions in which terrorist violence is recognised as being utterly unacceptable, whatever the motive for it may be. There can be no room for doubt, on the basis of the measures which the Government has taken, about its determination to achieve that objective and to defeat terrorism. For these reasons the United Kingdom Government consider that any allegations suggesting a consistent pattern of gross and reliably attested violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the United Kingdom Government are unfounded.

It is not for the United Kingdom to comment upon the criticisms of the Government of the Republic of Ireland set out in the petition. It is, however, appropriate to state that the security forces in Northern Ireland receive valuable cooperation from the security forces in the Republic, in the prevention of crime, including terrorist crime, and the detection and apprehension of offenders. With regard to extradition, Her Majesty's Government regrets that the courts in the Republic have interpreted the law there so as effectively to preclude the extradition of a person who claims that the motive for committing the offence alleged against him was political. Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the Republic have however introduced legislation to enable, in certain circumstances, offenders to be brought to trial in either country. Under these arrangements, there have recently been some successful prosecutions.