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NORTHERN IRELAND Information Service

MS pa prison N-I

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SECRETARY OF STATE PRAISES NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE

Conditions in the Maze Prison, indeed throughout the prison system in Northern Ireland, are widely regarded as amongst the best in Europe, the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Peter Brooke MP, said at Westminster today.

Replying to a Private Notice Question by Mr James Kilfedder MP on extradition between the Irish Republic and the UK following yesterday's decision in the Supreme Court, Dublin, the Secretary of State said:

"The Supreme Court in Dublin yesterday overruled orders for the extradition to Northern Ireland of Dermot Finucane and James Pius Clarke. Both men are convicted terrorists who escaped from the Maze Prison during the mass breakout in 1983. Clarke was serving 18 years for the attempted murder of a member of the UDR; and Finucane was serving 18 years for possession of firearms and ammunition. Upon their apprehension in the Republic of Ireland extradition of both was ordered by the District Court. Appeals on behalf of both men were quashed by the High Court but were yesterday upheld in the Supreme Court, their last Court of Appeal. The Government is deeply disappointed at that decision.

"Details of the judgements, which I understand are lengthy and complex, are not yet available to us. But I believe that the main ground of appeal was that their rights under the Irish Constitution would be infringed by the treatment these prisoners would be thought likely to receive in the prison system of Northern Ireland. That this was upheld by the Court is both

disturbing and difficult to understand. It is an unacceptable slur on the professionalism of the men and women of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. I shall be studying the full judgement as soon as it is available and will pay particular attention to the references to Northern Ireland prisons. The conditions in the Maze Prison, indeed throughout the prison system in Northern Ireland are widely regarded as amongst the best in Europe.

"Both the British and Irish Governments have pledged themselves to ensure that effective arrangements are in place for dealing with fugitive offenders. Extradition is a vital factor in this. I remind the House that it was the Irish authorities who originally sought these extraditions on our behalf and who have continued to make strenuous efforts, at every level of their judicial system, to bring these cases to a successful conclusion.

"I shall, obviously, also be studying the full judgement carefully to see what implications it has for other cases. It is clearly right that each case should be considered on its merits. But our principal concern, shared with the Irish Government, is that the system as a whole should work effectively, as well as fairly. We will be pursuing this with the Irish Government."