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NORTHERN IRELAND
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PRISON SEGREGATION - NOT A NEW PHENOMENON - JOHN COPE

Attacks on staff, destruction of prison property and political pressure to achieve paramilitary segregation in Northern Ireland's prisons are not a new phenomenon according to the Minister of State

Rt Hon John Cope MP and the Government's attitude to it is not about to change in the face of the latest outburst.

Commenting on the current campaign to extend segregation to HMP Belfast John Cope said: "Twenty years of experience in dealing with paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland has clearly demonstrated that segregated conditions play into the hands of terrorist organisations.

"Once granted, the hidden agenda becomes immediately apparent: subversion and dominance of other prisoners by the paramilitary leadership are what it is about.

"The current campaign seeks to play on the fears of the families of prisoners in creating artificial tensions at the prison, and has included unwarranted and cowardly attacks on staff and their families".

John Cope explained that campaigners for segregation argue that it increases the security of individual prisoners, reduces the risk to staff, and improves control, but such claims were not supported by the facts.

"The most serious attacks by prisoners on prisoners have always occurred in segregated wings. It is also clear that segregation facilitates escape planning and implementation".

In conclusion the Minister paid tribute to the fortitude of staff involved and the support given to the Prison Service by the general public and their representatives and added: "Current policies in the prisons in Northern Ireland have already signalled a better future for prisoners and their families. Attempts to limit or shut down the options for reform and a better life for individual prisoners will continue to be resisted strongly by the Government".

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