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To H.A.

From Belfast

For Secretary

From Joint Secretary

Ref: Your/My

Subject House of Commons Statement - Stevens

COMMENTS

Secretary of State's Statement to House of Commons on
Stevens' Inquiry Report - See para. 6.

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With permission, I should like to make a statement about the report of an enquiry conducted in Northern Ireland by Mr John Stevens, Deputy Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire. Mr Stevens was appointed on 14 September 1989 by the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to conduct an inquiry into allegations of collusion between members of the security forces in Northern Ireland and Loyalist paramilitaries, and to make recommendations. He presented his report to the Chief Constable on 5 April 1990 and, subsequently, he has prepared a summary of his findings and recommendations. That summary, together with a copy of the complete report, was made available to me earlier this week. The Chief Constable has made the summary report publicly available earlier today. Copies have been placed in the Library of this House and that of another place.

2. Mr Stevens conducted a most thorough and wide-ranging enquiry in which, as he himself stresses, he has at all times received full co-operation at every level from both the RUC and Army. In connection with his enquiry, 94 persons have been arrested, of whom 59 have either been charged with, or reported for, a variety of criminal offences. The majority of these cases are covered by the sub judice rule and it would be improper for me to comment further about them.

3. Mr Speaker, the report from Mr Stevens was addressed to the Chief Constable. Many of its conclusions and recommendations are primarily for him to consider. Others are for the Army authorities in Northern Ireland, or my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

4. Mr Stevens found that the passing of information to paramilitaries did take place; but that this was restricted to a small number of individuals and was neither widespread nor institutionalised. Moreover, he has recognised that steps taken by

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the police and the Army both before and since September 1989 have already significantly reduced the risk of repetition. No document so far traced to the possession of Loyalist paramilitaries bore a recent date. Mr Stevens recognises that there must be some tension between the need to disseminate information for operational purposes and the need effectively to safeguard that information. He finds, nevertheless, that there were deficiencies in procedures for identifying and accounting for documents containing sensitive information. Far too much material was circulating at any one time; and the easy availability of photocopiers further extended the risk of unlawful dissemination. Accordingly, the report contains a number of detailed recommendations aimed at further improving the arrangements for the dissemination and control of all sensitive information; already some of these have been and others are being implemented. Mr Stevens notes that the absence of adequate control procedures at the material time severely hampered the efforts of his enquiry to discover the origins of documents and to trace persons who might have been criminally responsible for passing them on; and that, for related reasons, it cannot be assumed that a document with a particular provenance was leaked directly from the organisation which produced it.

5. As Mr Stevens' own summary makes clear, any evidence or allegation of criminal conduct was rigorously followed up. No charges have been laid against any member of the RUC. Mr Stevens concluded that there had been criminal misbehaviour by a few individual members of the Ulster Defence Regiment. This is a matter of great regret to me as I know it is to the great majority of those honourable and courageous men and women who are the backbone of a very fine Regiment; and I therefore welcome Mr Stevens' equally firm conclusion that it would be wholly wrong to believe that a significant proportion of members of the UDR were involved with paramilitaries. The House will know that steps have already been

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taken to tighten up procedure for screening potential members of the Regiment. Mr Stevens has made recommendations for further improvements to the arrangements in this area.

6. I see nothing in the findings of the Stevens enquiry to lessen my conviction that the UDR plays a vital and valued part in the Army's support for the police-led anti-terrorist effort. I am convinced that the Regiment is fundamentally sound; I am fully aware of the great efforts that continue to be made by the Regiment steadily to improve its effectiveness and professionalism, and I have no doubt that the overwhelming majority of its members impartially serve the whole community in Northern Ireland. I remind the House that, in that service, over 180 serving and over 40 former members of the Regiment have been killed in Northern Ireland in the past 20 years; only 2 days ago 11 members of the UDR were decorated or were mentioned in Despatches.

7. Mr Stevens also makes proposals relating to the technical and scientific support services available to the RUC's anti-terrorist work, identifying in particular scene of crime examinations, fingerprint analysis and the scientific examination of possible exhibits. The need for improvements in many of these areas had already been recognised by the Chief Constable; and Mr Stevens' recommendations in these fields will now be for the Chief Constable to take forward. I stand ready to respond as sympathetically as I can to any specific recommendations which the Chief Constable may wish to put to me.

9. Mr Speaker, painful though its findings in some respects may be, the Stevens' report is a most valuable document. It has highlighted shortcomings and deficiencies in several important areas. Action by the police and the Army to remedy many of the deficiencies to which Mr Stevens has drawn attention has already been taken or is now in hand; and immediate consideration will now

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be given to his detailed recommendations for further improvements. I am sure that the whole House shares my gratitude to the Chief Constable of the RUC for initiating this inquiry and to Mr Stevens for the exemplary care and vigour with which he has carried it out. It will contribute to increasing the skill and dedication with which the Security Forces carry out their vital task of combatting and defeating terrorism in Northern Ireland wherever it is to be found. I hope the whole House will join me in paying tribute to the skilled, courageous and impartial way in which they carry it out.