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SEAN QUINN GROUP

Our Ref. DM/GC/477

6th February, 1991

Ms. Mary Wheelan,
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2.

RE: BORDER CHECKPOINT AT GORTMULLAN, DERRYLIN, CO. FERMANAGH

Dear Mary,

Further to our telephone conversation yesterday, I now enclose copy of the letter which our Managing Director, Mr. Sean Quinn, sent recently to Mr. Richard Needham M.P., Minister for Economic Development. The letter speaks for itself.

I would like to thank you for taking the trouble to ring me about this matter. Any assistance you can give us, in the context of our telephone conversation, would be much appreciated. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kindest regards.

Yours sincerely,

David Mackey,
General Manager.

Derrylin, Co. Fermanagh, N. Ireland BT92 9AU
Telephone: (036 574) 8866 Fax: (036 574) 8800 Telex: 747519 From Republic of Ireland, Prefix with (08)
Sean Quinn Quarries Ltd. Company Registered Number: N.I. 13573

Manufacturers of Cement, Roof Tiles, Pre-Stressed Products, Quarry and Concrete Products



SEAN QUINN GROUP

Our Ref. DM/GC/411

11th January, 1991

Mr. Richard Needham, M.P.,
Minister for Economic Development,
Private Office,
Netherleigh,
Massey Avenue,
Belfast.

Dear Minister,

ARMY CHECKPOINT AT GORTMULLAN, CO. FERMANAGH.

I am writing to you about the very serious difficulties which our Company is experiencing with the Army Checkpoint on the Ballyconnell road. Over the years we have made representations to numerous individuals and Departments - but all to no avail. The problems which the Checkpoint is posing for us have now reached the stage where it is putting the entire future of our operations here at Derrylin in serious jeopardy. Already, we have had to lay off over thirty employees, directly as a result of the adverse effect of the Checkpoint on our business. Unless something is done immediately to greatly improve the flow of traffic on a continuous basis, we will have no alternative but to put into effect relatively large scale lay-offs. Of necessity, we will have to make it known publicly that these lay-offs are a direct result of a complete lack of effective action by the Authorities in Northern Ireland.

Our Company makes a very significant contribution to the economy of Northern Ireland, not alone in terms of employment but, also, in terms of exports. Over fifty per cent of our products are exported to the Republic of Ireland. At one stage, monthly exports amounted to the equivalent of £14m per annum. However, on the basis of our weekly sales monitoring, this figure will reduce to £10m at the end of our current financial year.

We find that each week we are suffering a very serious and progressive loss of business from the Republic because potential customers there are not prepared to travel to our plants to collect goods because of the exceptionally long delays they invariably encounter - coming and going back. Additionally, with delays ranging from fifteen to sixty minutes we find that our own trucks are unable to meet delivery schedules with goods such as readymix concrete and customers are simply not prepared to put up with such bad service - irrespective of the cause.

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At the present time we have almost 300 persons employed in our different manufacturing plants here at Derrylin. Employees travelling to and from work through the Checkpoint are now experiencing delays of up to 45 minutes, on a regular basis. This should be considered against the background that a delay of even five minutes is serious for them. On a number of occasions, employees have had to abandon their cars and walk to work. Not alone does this cause very serious inconvenience for the employees themselves, it also causes serious disruption to our manufacturing operations and delivery schedules (in the case of drivers). It goes without saying that it also does nothing to improve relations between the local community and the security forces. One sees a sign at the Checkpoint reading, "We regret the delay - blame the terrorists". The delays I am referring to are playing into the hands of terrorism. It is also very difficult to take such expressions on board when one is faced with the task of repaying the cost of a £30m Cement Plant and paying out a weekly wage bill of £70,000 together with income tax and national insurance contributions of £40,000 weekly.

Our Group is not the only operation affected by the Checkpoint. In what would otherwise be a seriously deprived cross-border area in terms of unemployment, we have companies such as McCaffrey Bros., A.W. Ennis & Company Ltd., Boxmore Plastics P.L.C. and Teemore Engineering, which between them provide employment for an additional 400 persons. Their operations are also seriously disrupted and they have to incur unnecessary extra costs because of the delays caused by the Army Checkpoint.

It has long been acknowledged, not alone in Northern Ireland, but internationally, that subversive activities often find their roots in unemployment blackspots. It is ironic, therefore, that, in an area such as this, where our Group of Companies and the others which I've mentioned, are providing a large number of well paid jobs, our efforts are being very seriously hindered by the very forces which are put in place to try to eliminate terrorist activity.

I have already sent documentation dated July 1990 to the Civil Representatives Office and others, quantifying the annual cost of providing extra lorries, etc. at £155,000. The delays have become much worse since then and the costs correspondingly higher. These costs are relatively small compared to the loss of business from the Republic which is now hitting us very hard - as a result of very stiff and unrelenting competition from companies such as Irish Cement, who went to great lengths to stop us getting our Cement Manufacturing Plant into operation in the first instance.

I am convinced that I am being in no way unreasonable in voicing my complaints about the Checkpoint. In fact, my views are confirmed by the Viscount Colville of Culross, Q.C. in his "Review of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts, 1978 and 1987", which was presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in July last (CM 1115), and in which the Checkpoint here at Gortmullan is specifically referred to. In his Review Viscount Colville states, "Delays at Permanent Vehicle Checkpoints on the Border are a continuing irritation to regular users..... At Gortmullan in South East Co. Fermanagh there are regularly delays which cause frustration to those who cross the border to their work and substantial financial penalties for commercial firms. One industrialist calculated that the delays at that crossing alone cost him nearly £300,000 pa. largely made up from having to run 5 extra lorries..... I have much sympathy with proposals for some time-and-motion techniques to be applied. Some

PVCP's such as Aughnacloy have a lay-by facility into which a vehicle to be searched is diverted, allowing the other traffic to proceed; but at others, like Gortmullan, the road is a narrow lane in each direction. The cost of purchasing a small piece of land and surfacing it would bring a handsome return in goodwill. It is very hard to devise a method of apologising to individuals for delays which can badly upset the purpose of a journey; the better solution must be to avoid the tail-back".

In the immediate years ahead, tourism will play an increasingly important role in stimulating the local economy of this cross-border area and will bring about greater interaction and communication between people on both sides of the border. On our part we have invested £12m in a luxury hotel, leisure complex and championship golf course just across the border in Ballyconnell. Work has already commenced on the Ballinamore-Ballyconnell Canal which will link the Erne and the Shannon waterways and which is being promoted by the British and Irish Governments. Just before Christmas the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland attended the launching of the Canal project in our hotel. Our own hotel project and the canal link have been tangibly acknowledged by the International Fund for Ireland, through financial assistance, as being major flagship projects which greatly assist in the process of economic development in cross-border areas. As a result of these projects tourism revenue and tourist numbers will, at the very least, treble in this area in the course of the next few years - if our efforts are not thwarted by the Army Checkpoint. The very existence of the Checkpoint will steer people away from the area and is already having a very adverse effect on our hotel complex. On the second night of Christmas, for example, there was a tail back of traffic travelling to the hotel for at least half a mile. This is only one of many complaints we have received about the Checkpoint from persons from Northern Ireland attending functions in the hotel.

If the Authorities still feel that the Checkpoint is necessary at all then, as an interim short term solution, we would like to see traffic through the Checkpoint free flowing in both directions. In our opinion, however, the Checkpoint is of absolutely no advantage in combatting terrorism. In the ten years prior to it being set up, there was no evidence of subversive action along the stretch of roadway involved. Furthermore, there are two alternative cross-border roads within half a mile of the Checkpoint and located on each side of it. Both of these roads were shown by me, personally, to Supt. Ken McFarland of the R.U.C. and the Officer Commanding of the British Army for Northern Ireland.

If the Checkpoint was removed tomorrow there would be no adverse reaction locally. Both communities in this area live and work together in harmony. A good example of this is the South West Fermanagh Development Organisation which is a community group comprising people of both religious communities living and working in the Teemore area and with the aim of facilitating and encouraging local enterprise.

Eighteen years ago I started my operations here at Derrylin with two employees. My dedicated workforce and I have since built our Company into one of the largest employers in Northern Ireland. It is sad to know that our Company is being put into jeopardy by the vehicle Checkpoint. You will understand that unless something positive is done then, I will have to call together my workforce to acquaint them of the seriousness of the matter and the implications involved for themselves and their families. With great reluctance I will also have to bring the matter to public attention. The current economic downturn

in Northern Ireland and the Republic together with the normal slowdown in business during the winter months will make life very difficult for us in the current year - without the additional imposition of the problems caused by the Checkpoint.

I realise that there are many constraints on your time and I am sorry to have to write such a "long-winded" letter. However, I am doing so, as a last resort, out of a sense of years of total frustration which has now reached its climax. I am conscious and appreciative of the fact that many personnel in the R.U.C. and the Army have gone to great lengths to be helpful to us. I would also like to emphasise that we find the vast majority of such personnel extremely courteous and helpful.

I have no doubt that you will read this letter personally and that you will take the necessary steps, as a matter of great urgency, to remedy, permanently, the grave difficulties which the Checkpoint is posing for us.

Because of the seriousness and urgency of this matter and in order to avoid the delay of your office having to do so, I have taken the liberty of sending copies of this letter to those mentioned below because of their direct interest in the matter or the fact that they have tried to assist with this problem in the past.

Yours sincerely,

Sean Quinn,
Managing Director.

- Cc: 1. The Viscount Colville of Culross, Q.C.,
Morlingham Hall, Bucks, Suffolk MK34 7RA.
2. Lord Brookeborough, Ashbrook House, Brookeborough,
Co. Fermanagh.
3. Supt. Ken McFarland, R.U.C. Barracks, Enniskillen.
4. Mr. Tony Hopkins, Chief Executive,
Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland.
5. Mr. Robert Alston, N.I.O., Stormont House, Belfast BT5.
6. Mr. J.P.H. Harrison, Civil Adviser to the General Officer
Commanding Northern Ireland, Headquarters Northern Ireland,
British Forces Post Office 8825.
7. Mr. S. D. Woods, Principal Civil Representative,
Civil Representatives Office.