

Mr Peter Barry TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Dublin

Parochial House
Armagh
22 November 1985

Dear Minister,

On Thursday morning 21 November 1985 while having a spiritual visit with a parishioner , in the visiting box of the Maze Prison (cellular Maze) where the door is closed, - my visit was interrupted by an officer who told us to stop speaking Irish. He said this was the order of the Principal Officer. Both priest and prisoner were astounded. We continued the visit in English and I conducted my next visit with , also a parishioner who is a fluent Irish speaker and wished to speak Irish, in English. After the second visit I asked to see the Principal Officer and pointed out that I regarded this an infringement of freedom of conscience and cultural rights. He told me that he had just phoned the governor and that the governor asserted that the spiritual visit must be in English. I find this an extraordinary situation. The principal officer referred to the Irish language as a foreign language. In Armagh prison not only has Mass been said in Irish but some of the prayers are frequently said in Irish and indeed spiritual conversation often conducted in Irish. In the case of the Maze has this been a case of a horrible mistake or pure bigotry? If it is a rule then unless clarified and remedied I think it is a matter for international rights bodies.

Beir beannacht

Yours sincerely

Fr Raymond Murray