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*M. Murphy*

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FROM: MRS C COLLINS  
Police Division  
1 June 1994



- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Wood - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Lyon - B
- Mr Marsh - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mr Bramley - B
- Mr Kyle - B

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*173/6*

*Mr W. Williams*  
*for file*  
*Done*  
*2/6*

PS/Sir John Wheeler (B)

REPLACEMENT PLASTIC BATON-ROUND WEAPON SYSTEM - OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENT

1. This is to advise Ministers that the Chief Constable of the RUC and the GOC have agreed that the new Heckler and Koch Plastic Baton-Round weapon system will be operationally deployed in Northern Ireland with effect from Friday 3 June 1994. POB were informed by the RUC today.

Publicity

2. News of the intention to bring this new weapon system into operation was already given limited coverage in the local press some months ago. The Irish are also aware of it and a copy of this note is being sent to the Secretariat. Although in reality any situation where plastic baton rounds have to be fired, has more potential for controversy than the equipment simply used to fire them, we have nonetheless prepared the attached defensive briefing which can be deployed if required; it would be unwise to underestimate the potential for media interest in this subject, now we are close to the marching season.

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3. A copy of the RUC press release is also attached for information, at Annex A.

Signed

C R COLLINS

Police and Armed Forces in Northern Ireland must be appropriately equipped for their difficult role in maintaining public order, and defending the community and themselves from violence.

In order to conform with the law, which requires that only such force as is reasonable in the circumstances may be used, the security forces have been equipped with baton rounds as one means of dealing with riot situations.

It is understood that the use of baton rounds is not free from risk. No method of controlling such violence is entirely safe and the authorities keep alternatives under continuous review. Those currently available are not considered to be effective in controlling the type of rioting experienced in Northern Ireland.

Alternatives which would be more accurate and effective whilst being less severe on the targeted individual are constantly being sought.

The new baton round gun will further reduce the already low risk of fatal injuries.

In the professional judgement of the Chief Constable of the RUC (which the Government supports) PSR's must continue to be available to the security forces as the best method, in all the circumstances, of maintaining public order when the consequences of failure to control the situation are serious and where other methods are inadequate.

Baton rounds are used in accordance with clear instructions.

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## LINE TO TAKE

- A replacement baton-gun weapon system was required as the existing weapons are no longer in production
- The Police and Armed Forces in Northern Ireland must be appropriately equipped for their difficult role of maintaining public order, and defending the community and themselves from violence
- In order to conform with the law, which requires that only such force as is reasonable in the circumstances may be used, the security forces have been equipped with baton rounds as one means of dealing with riot situations
- It is understood that the use of baton rounds is not free from risk. No method of controlling such violence is entirely safe and the authorities keep alternatives under continuous review. Those currently available are not considered to be effective in controlling the type of rioting experienced in Northern Ireland
- Alternatives which would be more accurate and effective whilst being less severe on the targeted individual are constantly being sought
- The new baton round gun will further reduce the already low risk of fatal injuries
- In the professional judgement of the Chief Constable of the RUC (which the Government supports) PBR's must continue to be available to the security forces as the best method, in all the circumstances, of maintaining public order when the consequences of failure to control the situation are serious and where other methods are inadequate
- Baton rounds are used in accordance with clear instructions

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issued by the Chief Constable and General Officer Commanding, which are intended to minimise the possibility of injury and ensure that the law is respected

- The use of baton rounds is closely monitored, and all deaths and serious injuries allegedly caused by baton rounds are fully investigated by the RUC

- Fortunately in recent years the level of public disorder has reduced very considerably, and there have been only a small number of occasions when it has been necessary for the security forces to use PBRs.

The equipment was selected after an extensive research programme involving the police and the Ministry of Defence and will meet the needs of Police Forces throughout the United Kingdom.

All those who will use the new equipment have been fully trained.

NOTES:

1. The usage of plastic baton rounds in Northern Ireland has declined substantially over the years from a peak of more than 29,000 in 1981, the year of the hunger strikes, to 89 in 1992, the lowest since baton rounds were first fired in 1970 (see attached table). The usage increased somewhat, to 523 in 1993, and in the current year, to the end of April, the figure is 13. The Chief Constable has repeatedly expressed the hope that the day will soon come when the firing of plastic baton rounds is no longer necessary.

2. The use of PBRs constitutes minimum force relative to the circumstances. The rules covering their use state that riot guns will only be used in accordance with the principle of the minimum and reasonable amount of force necessary for the protection of life and property; the preservation of peace, and the prevention and detection of crime.

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ANNEX A

PRESS RELEASE

REPLACEMENT BATON GUN

The Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Army have been equipped with a new single-shot baton gun. It replaces the existing baton guns in use with both organisations, but still fires a plastic round.

A police spokesman said a replacement was required as the existing weapons are no longer in production. The equipment was selected after an extensive research programme involving the police and the Ministry of Defence and will meet the needs of Police Forces throughout the United Kingdom.

All those who will use the new equipment have been fully trained.

NOTES:

1. The usage of plastic baton rounds in Northern Ireland has declined substantially over the years from a peak of more than 29,000 in 1981, the year of the hunger strikes, to 89 in 1992, the lowest since baton rounds were first fired in 1970 (see attached table). The usage increased somewhat, to 523 in 1993, and in the current year, to the end of April, the figure is 13. The Chief Constable has repeatedly expressed the hope that the day will soon come when the firing of plastic baton rounds is no longer necessary.
2. The use of PBRs constitutes minimum force relative to the circumstances. The rules covering their use state that riot guns will only be used in accordance with the principle of the minimum and reasonable amount of force necessary for the protection of life and property; the preservation of peace, and the prevention and detection of crime.

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The replacement weapon is both lighter and more compact than the models it replaces.

RUC Headquarters  
23 May 1994

1974	2,828
1975	3,701
1976	3,464
1977	2,490
1978	1,743
1979	1,272
1980	1,231
1981	29,601
1982	489
1983	661
1984	1,768
1985	1,172
1986	1,787
1987	2,971
1988	3,109
1989	937
1990	257
1991	323
1992	89
1993	523
1994	13

(end of April)

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TABLEBATON ROUNDS FIRED BY THE SECURITY FORCES BY YEAR

1970	238
1971	16,752
1972	23,363
1973	12,766
1974	2,828
1975	3,701
1976	3,464
1977	1,490
1978	1,743
1979	1,271
1980	1,231
1981	29,601
1982	489
1983	661
1984	1,768
1985	1,172
1986	1,787
1987	2,571
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