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S	85	1	2	3

16 November, 1995

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Honorable William J. Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C.

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Dear Mr. President:

Central to the functioning of any democracy is a respect for basic civil liberties and political rights. Amnesty International believes that it is the continued abrogation of these basic rights that has played a central role in the conflict in Northern Ireland. As you prepare for your upcoming visit to the United Kingdom and Ireland, Amnesty International, together with other members of the international human rights community, express sincere hopes that you will give expression to the centrality of human rights in the peace process.

The pace of events in Ireland that began to unfold in the summer of 1994 gives hope that political movement on the constitutional question will continue. Yet as commentators have observed, issues of social justice in Northern Ireland are intertwined with the constitutional question and indeed may very well be one and the same. Any attempt to address Northern Ireland's constitutional status must be coupled with a recognition that in order for a peaceful and lasting solution to occur, human rights must be respected. Yet despite a cease-fire by both republican and loyalist paramilitaries, the abrogation of basic human rights and civil liberties continues. These include:

- * the continued use of plastic bullets. According to the RUC, 279 plastic bullets have been fired since the beginning of the cease-fires in August 1994 until August of this year. Ostensibly the use of plastic bullets is limited to riot control, however since 1969 seventeen people have been killed by plastic or rubber bullets; many of these have been children;
- * trial without jury under the Diplock Courts system;
- * denial of prompt access to legal advice for detainees in the Castlereagh holding centre;
- * ill treatment of detainees in holding centres by police officers. While Amnesty International acknowledges that complaints have decreased, in 1994 there were 140 formal complaints of assault lodged against the police. In addition to complaints of physical assault, Amnesty has received numerous complaints of verbal and psychological abuse as well as threats of violence;

- * continued abrogation of the right of an accused to remain silent during interrogation or trial without negative inferences drawn;
- * prolonged detention without a judicial hearing. In continuing this practice, the United Kingdom has derogated from provisions of both the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

As the demilitarization of the situation in Northern Ireland continues, we call on the government of the UK to rescind draconian emergency legislation currently in operation and strengthen domestic law to comply with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international human rights standards. Specifically we strongly urge:

- * the repeal of all emergency legislation;
- * restoration of the rights to silence;
- * the establishment of normal policing and police procedures and the termination of all covert operations;
- * the abolishment of special Diplock Courts;
- * the end to extended detention periods;
- * the closure of all holding centres;
- * the introduction of a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation; and
- * a fair review of all cases sentenced by Diplock Courts.

Mr. President, your contribution to the peace process in Northern Ireland has been invaluable. However, whilst the violence in Northern Ireland has ebbed, it has been replaced by a cold and fragile peace. We believe that in order to secure a lasting peace, respect for human rights are central and, therefore, Amnesty International respectfully requests that the human rights and civil liberties concerns we have outlined are raised during the course of your meetings with appropriate government officials.

Sincerely yours,

James O'Dea

James O'Dea, Washington Office Director
Amnesty International USA