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You have looked at the recent incidents involving Colin Duffy as evidence of police and army harassment and provocation. All I can say is that both are subject to investigation where complaints about their conduct are made, and that for the police there is an additional and important safeguard, the Independent Commission for Police Complaints. Incidentally, we will be strengthening the independence and role of this complaints body through the draft Police (Northern Ireland) Bill which has just been introduced into the House.

I have also noted that you telephoned the office about the bail conditions set for Colin Duffy, to express your concern that these might leave him vulnerable to assassination. I had these arrangements checked very quickly in light of the concern expressed, and, again the system worked. On an application for amendment, the bail conditions were made more flexible. Furthermore, Mr Duffy's solicitor can apply again for them to be changed if he feels this is necessary. I also made sure the Director of Public Prosecutions and Chief Constable were aware of the security concerns about Mr Duffy.

In light of the concern surrounding this case, however, and not least because of the violence that erupted, for example in Lurgan following Colin Duffy's recent arrest, both Adam Ingram and I have spoken to the Chief Constable about the case and I can assure you that he is aware of its sensitivity, and its importance. Adam Ingram had also met others, including Martin McGuinness to discuss the situation.

In a sense therefore we have done what you have asked in your letter, but I cannot give you an assurance that Mr Duffy will "be left alone by the RUC in future". This depends, as you would expect, on Mr Duffy's actions. But I can say that the police are aware of concerns about the case.

MARJORIE MOWLAM