



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

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SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR  
NORTHERN IRELAND

The Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP  
Secretary of State for the  
Home Department  
Queen Anne's Gate  
LONDON  
SW1H 9AT

1<sup>st</sup> October 1984

NBM  
K  
1/w.

Dear Home Secretary,

TIME LIMITS IN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter of 17 September to Willie Whitelaw about your intention to announce at the Party Conference a commitment in principle to the introduction of statutory time limits in criminal proceedings.

Delay in coming to trial is a severe problem in Northern Ireland too. My department has recently given it close attention, in co-operation with the Law Officers' Department and the Court Service. We have recognised that action on several fronts is necessary, to reduce delays to a minimum. Accordingly I could not take issue with your proposal to commit the Government in principle to time limits for England and Wales at the Conference. There are strong reasons in its favour.

Nevertheless, I cannot foresee our being able to adopt a system, similar to what you have in mind, in Northern Ireland while circumstances remain at all as they are today. Far too many crucial terrorist cases fall outside the limits that you propose. The enactment of Home Office legislation would leave Northern Ireland unhappily exposed, as the only jurisdiction in the United Kingdom unable to conform. We would have to consider how to meet this criticism without weakening our ability to bring terrorists to justice.

I/.....





I therefore support your intention to adopt a comprehensive approach to the whole problem, and to proceed cautiously with time limits by monitoring realistic experiments. I shall be interested to see the results of these. It will certainly ease our difficulties that you expect to introduce the limits piecemeal by geographical area, and with some flexibility in the precise limits in different areas.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Members of 'H' Committee, to Sir Michael Havers and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours Sincerely*  
*N & Ward.*

(Approved by the Secretary of State  
and signed in his absence in Belfast)



HOMES ARRIVED  
Sentences Blue  
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