

Paul Goggins MP - Minister of State with Responsibility for Prisons
Northern Ireland Office
Stormont House, Stormont Estate
Belfast, Northern Ireland
BT4 3SH

April 11, 2010

Dear Mr. Goggins

I am writing with my deep concerns regarding the dire situation at Maghaberry Prison, where recent disturbances brought world-wide attention to a trend of gravely worsening conditions inside.

I reference detailed testimonials by the political prisoners in Roe House at Maghaberry jail, in which are described instances of food and fresh water being with-held during extended periods of lock-down time of up to 23 hours at a time; meals denied to prisoners for up to four days, due to 'staff shortages'; indiscriminate transfer of prisoners to solitary confinement- where beatings have frequently taken place- for days at a time; an instance of a prisoner being viciously mauled by a prison dog in February; repeated body searches of prisoners up to 40 times in a single day, and strip-searches of family visitors including women.

I am also aware that the prisoners have made repeated complaints about unhygienic conditions, which include being forced to eat meals in their cells within inches of open toilets; rather than being permitted to eat in the dining area. Also, a previous protest at Roe House resulted in the men refusing to shave or cut their hair rather than being required to do so in their kitchen sink, where plates and cutlery are washed.

I further refer to a report of a recent visit to Maghaberry by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). The Committee's report described unacceptable conditions, including violent attacks by SST officers while being held in solitary confinement, instances of degrading and humiliating body-cavity searches, severe over-crowding, poor education and recreation facilities, and inadequate access to mental and physical health care.

There is no reason why these appalling abuses should continue in your facility. An independent review of this worsening situation must be made, if conditions have deteriorated so far as to force prisoners to resort to their action of Easter weekend; where the takeover of their quarters made International news.

The favor of a reply is requested. I have forwarded a copy of this letter to others including local media here.

Very Sincerely,