



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

First Minister can't even sign a letter on his own!



STATEMENT BY JIM ALLISTER MEP

"I am appalled by confirmation in a letter from the Head of the Civil Service, Nigel Hamilton, that if I, or anyone else, writes to the First Minister on a topic for which OFMDFM has responsibility, for example "victims", then Martin McGuinness must not only see my correspondence, but must agree the response and **jointly sign** the reply.

It is scandalous to think that if a victim or victim's group writes to the First Minister about an IRA incident of which the Deputy First Minister, in his confessed role as an IRA leader, approved or might have knowledge through his organisation, that he will be privy to what they write and the response thereto. What an insult! But then, this is an office built upon such travesty, where the First Minister is joined at the hip with McGuinness and can do nothing without him and his consent.

This arrangement will I know, from my work with victim's groups, greatly restrain their freedom of communication with the First Minister, because what you tell him you tell McGuinness. **Victims rightly resent and despise those who made them victims, yet now in Northern Ireland a victim can't write to the First Minister without McGuinness pouring over their correspondence and then adding insult to injury by signing the reply! "**

Notes to Editors:

This is one of the replies which Mr Allister had been waiting several weeks to receive. The reply was suddenly dispatched on the day (15 June) Mr Allister complained about the lack of response. The full correspondence is set out below.

*Mr Nigel Hamilton
Permanent Secretary
Office of First and Deputy First Minister
Block A, Castle Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3SR*

*8 May 2007
Dear Mr Hamilton,*

Pursuant to the appointment of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, please advise me of the protocol/procedures which will govern the sharing of information as between the appointees. In particular, if I as a public representative have occasion to write to the First Minister, for example, will my correspondence, and any documentation/information generated by it, be available to the Deputy First Minister, and/or his Junior Minister and/or their



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staff (including specialist advisers), either as of right, given the joint nature of the office, or upon request, or not at all? Or will I be able to stipulate that my correspondence, and any documentation/information generated by it, should be seen only by the office-holder of my choice?

I would appreciate total clarity on this matter.

Yours sincerely,
James H Allister

Head of the Civil Service
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HCS/553/07

James H Allister QC MEP
139 Holywood Road
BELFAST
BT43BE
15 June 2007

Dear Mr Allister,

I am replying to your letter to me of 8 May seeking clarification on the procedures which will apply to the sharing of information between the First Minister and deputy First Minister and, specifically, information conveyed in correspondence.

I apologise for the slight delay in replying, due to the need to ensure that the First Minister and deputy First Minister are content with this reply.

Any correspondence addressed to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, either individually or jointly, and which relates to a matter for which they exercise joint responsibility, will be seen by both Ministers. Official advice on the matters raised in the correspondence will be submitted to both simultaneously and, after joint consideration, the response will be agreed and signed by both.

You will appreciate, therefore, that in the exercise of their statutory responsibilities, they will be unable to comply with any request that correspondence should be seen only by the office-holder you specify.

Yours sincerely
NIGEL HAMILTON