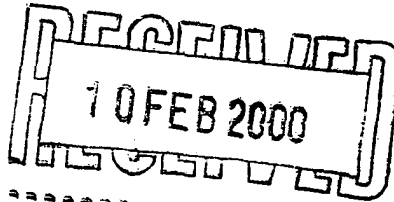




HER MAJESTY'S CORONER

DISTRICT OF GREATER BELFAST

John L Leckey LL.M.
H.M. Coroner
Coroner's Office
Courthouse
37 Church Road
Newtownabbey
Co. Antrim BT36 7LA
Northern Ireland



Your ref: [REDACTED]

8th February 2000

Dear Sirs

ROBERT HAMILL, DECEASED

When we met towards the end of last month you made representations to me not to hold an inquest. You advised me that you would prefer that the circumstances of the death should be investigated through the medium of a public/judicial inquiry constituted on a similar basis to that of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. My understanding was that if I acceded to your request you proposed to then make representations to the Secretary of State for an inquiry.

Both of us agreed that there is a very real difficulty with regard to certain witnesses who could give important and relevant evidence concerning the death of Mr Hamill. These witnesses believe that giving evidence in court would seriously threaten their personal safety. Even if they were screened when giving evidence and/or were referred to by a code-letter, these fears would remain. The nature of the evidence they are able to give is capable of identifying them even with these safeguards. I have been advised that these considerations resulted in the witnesses refusing to give evidence in a proposed prosecution by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

I have spoken personally to the witnesses and I am satisfied that their fears and concerns are genuine. Also, I have discussed this issue with the police officer in charge of the investigation and he shares my view.

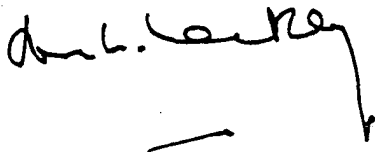
The holding of an inquest in Northern Ireland is not mandatory (see s 13 of the 1959 Coroners' Act). However, having given due consideration to your representations that I should not hold an inquest I have decided that it is in

41375

the wider public interest that an inquest should be held. Further, having given due weight to the fears of the witnesses I have referred to, I have decided not to call any as a witness or to admit their statements pursuant to Rule 17 of the 1963 Coroners' Rules. The inevitable result of this will be that the inquest will not receive some potentially important and relevant evidence, but I have decided that the personal safety of these witnesses, in the unfortunate circumstances prevailing in this case, must outweigh the obvious desirability of the inquest receiving their evidence.

I will now proceed to make arrangements for the holding of the inquest and I will advise you as soon as possible of the date and venue. It is unlikely that the hearing will be before Easter.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.L. Leckey'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail that ends in a small hook. Below the signature, there is a short horizontal line.

J L LECKEY
HM CORONER FOR GREATER BELFAST