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Mr. John O Donoghue,
Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform,
72 – 76 St. Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2.

17th May 2000

Dear John,

Further to your letter of 3rd May, I of course fully accept the Government's policy of Direct Provision and would not wish to see it undermined. As you know, I instructed my officials to argue for Direct Provision at the inter-Departmental Committee on these matters as long ago as 1997. This was in response to the perception that the social welfare system was in some way attracting asylum seekers to this State and I felt that a system of Direct Provision was the only effective way of meeting that argument. In fact, it was a matter of some disappointment to me that it took as long as it did to get a system of Direct Provision in place.

The most effective way of providing asylum seekers with a residual income when they are in Direct Provision is for the payment to be made in cash at the Reception Centre. I agree that this cannot be done overnight but such a system could be implemented within weeks. This approach should be incorporated in the draft policy document that your Department is currently preparing. It would remove the need for the social welfare system to be involved through Community Welfare Officers. It would be more sensible from the asylum seeker's point of view also, as they would be getting their income directly without having to claim it at the Post Office or at the Bank. It would also be more efficient from an administrative viewpoint as the cost of administering these payments through the social welfare system is a very high proportion of the value of the payment.

With regard to people who leave or do not avail of Direct Provision, you mention that quite a number of instances have been brought to your attention but you did not provide any details. You will appreciate that I cannot have this investigated without having specific details of the cases concerned. A handwritten list of some 120 individuals was provided last week in response to a request from my officials for relevant details. However, the information provided was illegible in many instances and no details of social welfare payments were included. My officials have had the list typed, insofar as they could make out the information provided, and returned to your Department for amendment and any further details that you may have. A response is still awaited.

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