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MINISTER AND DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM
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**Statement by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform,
John O'Donoghue T.D., on the publication of
UK White Paper on immigration, asylum and citizenship matters**

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, John O'Donoghue T.D., has noted with interest the contents of the White Paper on immigration, asylum and citizenship matters which was published today by the Mr. Jack Straw MP, UK Home Secretary. The Minister has been in contact with Mr. Straw who briefed him on the contents of the White Paper.

Since Ireland and the UK are neighbouring States and are part of a Common Travel Area, Mr. O'Donoghue said that "developments in the UK on the matters dealt with in the White Paper are of particular significance to us in Ireland and must be taken into account in our ongoing review of policy in this area".

The Minister went on and said that "partly in the knowledge that the UK authorities were reviewing their policy on asylum and immigration issues, the Interdepartmental Committee on Immigration, Asylum and Related Issues has been considering the operation of our asylum processing system and the overall regime for asylum seekers in Ireland. This consideration is continuing as a matter of urgency in the light of the policy changes now set out in the British White Paper".

Among the recommendations in a previous report of the Interdepartmental Committee, which were approved by Government on 17 February last, was that there should be a comparative study of Irish legislation and that of our EU partners to ascertain what changes might be necessary to align Irish policy on asylum more closely with that of our EU partners. That study is now underway. It is the Government's view that it is not possible for Ireland to pursue an Immigration and Asylum policy that deviates significantly from that of our neighbouring States.

The Minister is conscious of the great benefit conferred on residents of Ireland and Britain by the existence of the Common Travel Area. The Government regards the protection of the Common Travel Area as a primary policy function. This is a view which has been endorsed and upheld by the Courts as legitimate and fundamental and justifying the necessary steps to ensure its preservation. The Minister also signalled his strong support for the closest possible co-operation with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) of the Home Office on all matters of mutual interest. He also noted that a very high degree of co-operation is continuing

at policy and operational levels between his Department and the Garda Síochána on the one hand and the IND on the other.

In conclusion the Minister said that the Government is continuing to keep the asylum issue under review and pointed out that last week's Government decision to provide substantial additional resources i.e. 72 additional staff, was both timely and welcome. As regards the situation with asylum seekers arriving in the Wexford area from France, the Minister said that high level contact with the French authorities is ongoing. In this context a senior official of his Department and a senior Garda travelled to Cherbourg late last month for discussions with the French authorities there.

27 July, 1998.