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Secretary
C.C. B. O'Raghallaigh
WR. 5/11

OIFIG AN RÚNAÍ
An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt,
Comhionannais agus Athchóirithe
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Mr. D. Raghallaigh
Please discuss
WR. 5/11

4 November, 1997.

Dear Eddie,

Thank you for your letter of 22nd October regarding co-operation between our two Departments and the report in that days Irish Independent re asylum seekers.

First of all I would like to clarify what appeared in the report and assure you that any suggestion that officials of this Department "are investigating the possibility of major welfare fraud by asylum seekers" is of the newspaper's own making. In response to a query to our press office the Irish Independent was informed that there was a difference of approx. 1,000 between the number of asylum applicants registered at this Department and the numbers who turned up to have their I.D. cards re-issued, in the major re-issue over the previous few weeks and that officials were endeavouring to reconcile the figures. Any interpretation or "spin" put on the reply was entirely the responsibility of the Irish Independent.

Secondly, I fully agree that our two Departments and the Eastern Health Board must continue to co-operate with each other to the greatest extent possible. However, I believe that the level of contact and cooperation in this regard is already quite sufficient and that we should not require the hard-pressed officials concerned to participate in further meetings etc. unless it is essential to the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations that they do so. There is, as you know, daily liaison at operational level in relation to multiple applications by individuals, false ID cards etc. At senior level there are the monthly liaison meetings between representatives of both our Departments and the Health Board - the last meeting was held on Monday 20th October. You will no doubt be aware that a special meeting was also called by this Department and included Gardai from the Fraud and Immigration areas when a potential major fraud was uncovered in the Eastern Health Board area.

I would suggest that the daily co-operation at operational level together with monthly liaison meetings at management level is the best way to proceed at this stage. Special meetings can of course be arranged at short notice as required. The

officials concerned will be keeping the matter under review and will be keeping us informed.

Returning to the ID cards, the reconciliation of the difference between the number who turned up for the re-issue of ID cards and the numbers registered with this Department as asylum seekers is on-going but is a very laborious task. For your Department's purposes I understand that the reference numbers alone will be sufficient and the reference numbers in respect of the 1997 applicants who did not turn up for re-issue of ID cards have already been forwarded to you. These form over 800 of the 1,000 or so to be reconciled. The balance will be forwarded shortly. I also understand we have already supplied your Department with

- (i) a detailed list of our asylum applicants up to and including October 20th 1997,
- (ii) a full list of reference numbers with a comments field indicating whether they have received ID cards or not,
- (iii) a list of applicants who have Irish-born citizens,
- (iv) a list of applicants who have married Irish citizens,
- (v) a list of decisions made in 1997.

In relation to the provision of new technology, I understand that payments of supplementary welfare allowances to asylum applicants are in the course of being computerised. This is a welcome development which will facilitate tracking and enumeration of applicants in respect of such payments. There have been discussions over the past year or so between officials of both Departments with a view to designing a joint ID card for both asylum and welfare purposes. This ran into some difficulties with the Data Protection Commissioner regarding the joint aspect of ID cards. It has been suggested, I believe, that this may be resolved by providing for the joint aspect in legislation being promoted by one or other of our Departments. A further meeting between officials is fixed for this week to progress the matter.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Dalton
Secretary General

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