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From the archive, 8 May 1978: Aldo Moro's farewell letter before execution

Italian prime minister says goodbye to his wife before he is killed by Red Brigade terrorists

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"I kiss you for the last time," wrote the former Italian Prime Minister, Mr Moro, in a farewell letter to his wife on Friday, the day his Red Brigades kidnappers said they were going ahead with his execution, a Rome newspaper said yesterday.

"Dear Norina, they have told me that they are going to kill me in a little while," Mr Moro, 61, told Mrs Eleonora Moro, according to Il Tempo.

The newspaper report of the letter, which Il Tempo insisted was genuine, added a new twist to the story of the Moro kidnap - begun 53 days ago.

They said on Friday that they were going ahead and executing a death sentence passed on him by their "people's court." But they worded their communique ambiguously and - 48 hours later - no confirmation had arrived that Mr Moro was dead.

The Government insisted that hope remained that he was still alive. It viewed the Friday communique as one more ploy in a guerrilla war of nerves against the State.

Police kept up the hunt for Mr Moro and detained three suspected Left-wing extremists yesterday in swoops in Rome. A similar operation on Saturday led to 23 arrests.

Il Tempo said the Moro farewell letter was picked up by his daughter Anna on Friday after a telephone tip-off. Mrs Moro and the couple's four children are at the family home in Rome, waiting and praying.

Il Tempo said Mr Moro had referred briefly to the Government's refusal to bargain for his life.

The Government "could have done something if it had wanted to," Mr Moro was quoted as saying.

The lawyer defending 15 Red Brigades leaders on trial in Turin was reported yesterday to have failed in attempts to get them to plead for Mr Moro's life. The 15, facing trial on subversion charges, include the Red Brigades' leader, Renato Curcio, and three others who are on the list of the 13 prisoners the kidnappers want released.

The lawyer, Giannino Guiso, said after a three-hour meeting with the defendants that they did not want to put their signatures to any appeal. The defendants at the trial in Turin are not believed to have any direct contact with the kidnappers of Mr Moro, regarded by Italian security forces as "a new breed of terrorist."

The left-wing Rome newspaper, La Repubblica, said Mr Moro's letter had caused Mrs Moro to telephone the Italian president, Mr Leone, and implore him to pardon just one of the 13 named by the kidnappers.

Aldo Moro was kidnapped on 18 March 1978. He was found dead on 9 May.

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