

Michaela gets transfer from Peru jail to North

By Neil Michael, Catherine Fegan and Eamon O'Donoghue

CONVICTED drug smuggler Michaela McCollum could be transferred from a jail in Peru to the North by Christmas – to the delight of her campaigning family.

The woman and accomplice, Melissa Reid, were caught trying to smuggle nearly €2million of cocaine out of the South American country in August last year.

McCollum, of Co. Tyrone, and Reid, of Lenzie, Scotland, became known as the Peru Two and were later jailed for six years and eight months.

Peter Winters, McCollum's lawyer, yesterday said her appeal to serve the rest of her sentence at a jail back home in the North had been accepted.

Her father Robert McCollum told the Mail: 'I am delighted. It's a huge relief and she's a very lucky girl.'

'I know there has been a lot of work going on behind the scenes to try and get her home and I'm just glad to hear she will be getting out of there.'

'The first place [jail] she was in was bad, but the place she is in now is worse. She is in a cell with 30 other people and you can imagine the things she has seen. It's your worst nightmare.'

'At least now she will be in somewhere a bit more humane. For her, it's like winning the lotto.'

McCollum said: 'I have never visited her. I

She may be free in 2016 with good behaviour

couldn't visit her and then get back on a plane without taking her with me.

'Now I will hopefully be able to see her knowing she is closer to family and in a better place. At the minute she is in a very scary place and all she has out there is Melissa.'

McCollum, 21, and Reid, 20, were caught a year ago with more than 11 kilogrammes of cocaine at Lima Airport as they were on their way to board a flight to Spain.

Mr McCollum insisted his daughter has learned a hard lesson, saying: 'It's a hard lesson to learn. I know she has come in for criticism, but she is very young and very naive.'

'Michaela is very easily led and what happened was proof of that. It was one stupid decision cost her dearly.'

'When you think of what she became involved in, things could have ended up a lot worse for her.'

'It's been a long, long year and I'm just relieved at this point. I haven't seen her since before she left so I'm anxious for that meeting here at home.'

'It's good news, something she hasn't had in a while.'

McCollum is expected to be transferred from Peru's grim Ancon 2 jail to Belfast's Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre and Prison, which is reputedly known as 'Hydebank Wood Hotel'. Reid is being transferred from the prison to a Scottish one.

McCollum, who was memorably arrested wearing her hair in a bun, will be able to have her locks tended to at the Belfast jail's hairdressing salon.

Its library facilities are said to be 'excellent' and she will also be able to use the well-stocked gym. She will be able to decorate her cell with posters and put up curtains.

But her lawyer said she may have to wait months before she gets back despite the work of at least six governmental agencies.

He said: 'It is now one year since her arrest and detention. During that time she and her family have endured a significant amount of stress during what has been a traumatic time for them.'

'In the last number of months Michaela and her family have taken part in a high level of engagement with many different agencies in order to process her transfer from prison in Peru back to Northern Ire-

Family's joy as drug smuggler is allowed to serve her time in prison near home



Closer to home: Michaela's sister Samantha and mother Norah may be able to visit her in an Irish prison as early as Christmas



Caught: Michaela with Melissa Reid at the airport in Lima

land. The process has not been straightforward and involves substantial co-ordination with various embassies, the UK National Offender Management Service, the Peruvian Prison Service together with the Prison Service in NI.'

McCollum, of Dungannon, has had consular help from the Government here as she is an Irish citizen.

Mr Winters said: 'Last week we

received confirmation from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs that the Peruvian authorities had accepted Michaela's prison transfer request and in turn passed this to the UK Noms. It is our understanding that Noms is due to liaise with the various prison authorities to facilitate the next stage of the transfer process.'

'We further understand that the

relevant authorities in Peru and the UK have a system in place to make sure the transfer takes place as efficiently as possible.'

'At this stage it is not clear as to how long that process will take.'

McCollum and Reid are being held at Ancon 2, which is two-and-a-half hours outside Peru's capital, Lima. McCollum is in a cell with 30 others.

Mr Winters said sanitation and toi-

McCOLLUM WILL GET 'LUXURY' IN NORTH JAIL AFTER PERU HORROR

MICHAELLA McCollum's prison in the North will be a 'luxury' compared to where she is in Peru, say sources.

McCollum, 21, is held at the Ancon 2 jail where she shares a cell with 30 other inmates and where sanitation and hygiene is poor, according to reports.

She is expected to be transferred to Belfast's Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre and Prison – which is dubbed the Hydebank Hotel.

Hydebank inmates have cooking facilities, a fridge, a freezer and hobbies kits, and can wear their own clothing and use their own bedding, according to reports from UK's Independent Monitoring Board, which is a prison watchdog.

There are 13 sporting activities available, including gym facilities. Activities include weight loss programmes and circuit training.

Inmates can join any one of 23 edu-

cational courses. McCollum might be able to do a hairdressing course. She worked as a hairdresser for a time before she found herself behind bars and is taking a hairdressing class in prison in Peru, say reports.

At Hydebank prisoners are allowed to decorate their cells with posters, and a temporary release option is available to inmates within three years of their tariff. A home release for Christmas is also available pending a risk assessment review.

It is understood temporary release cases are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

It is believed the terms of McCollum's transfer from the Peruvian authorities will include details of her temporary release eligibility.

Hydebank has two different detention centres: one for young male offenders from 18 to 21, and another for female prisoners.

let facilities were poor and females had to use a hole in the ground, which has to be covered up due to vermin. Inmates frequently have to pay for their own food and clean water.

Once back, the Peru Two could end up being freed by early 2016. It is understood they could be released early for good behaviour.

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