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10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

12 April 2006

THE PRIME MINISTER

Ym Eminence,

I would like to take this opportunity to express my admiration for the role played by your Eminence in promoting a peaceful future for Iraq. Your Eminence's calm authority and spirit of forgiveness has been of central importance in preventing Iraq descending into uncontrollable violence. I remain, of course, deeply distressed by the continuing violence. I would like to extend my personal condolences over last week's horrific attacks in Najaf and at the Buratha Mosque.

I am writing to make clear my personal position on the political events taking place within Iraq. Iraq is a sovereign country. We respect the outcome of the electoral process, and accept that it is not for outsiders to say who should be Prime Minister. This has to be an Iraqi decision. But as leader of a country which has made huge sacrifices for Iraq, I trust it is understandable that we attach great importance to there being an effective government of national unity, capable of dealing with the challenges facing Iraq, led by a Prime Minister able to command widespread support and respect.

Our aim is one that I believe we share with the Iraqi people: an effective Government of National Unity as soon as possible. I recognise that the UIA as the largest bloc should nominate the Prime Minister. In the interests of the Iraqi people, we believe that person must also command broad support from others in the Council of Representatives.

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The Iraqi people voted for a government four months ago. They are still waiting for it to form. Meanwhile the violence gets worse. The Iraqi people need and deserve a government that can tackle the violence and sectarianism and that commands widespread support.

We have given strong support to the Iraqi people, and we want to continue doing so. I remain committed to helping the Iraqis secure for themselves a stable and prosperous future; but it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain the necessary public support for this in the face of the continuing inability of Iraq's political leaders to resolve their differences. Time is running out.

I would therefore request your Eminence to encourage leaders of the Shia community to recognise the need for urgent agreement, in the next few days, on who should lead the next government.

My representatives are at your disposal, and that of your close colleagues, should you wish to discuss these issues further.

I wish your Eminence health and well being; I know you will continue to give spiritual guidance to the work of the faithful. I welcome and respect your Eminence's keen desire to encourage brotherly peace between Iraqis and extend to all of them the benefits of the new Iraq. May God preserve your Eminence from harm, to the benefit of Iraq and humanity.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Blair

Grand Ayatollah Sistani

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