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4 July 2003

Sir Andrew Turnbull KCB CVO
Cabinet Office
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Dear Andrew,

DFID'S PERFORMANCE ON IRAQ - LETTER FROM SALLY KEEBLE MP

Thank you for forwarding me Sally Keeble's letter of 16 June. Sally makes serious - but unfounded - allegations against DFID's work on Iraq. What is striking about these allegations is that she did not raise them during her time here as PUSS with either Clare Short or Valerie Amos, or with me, other members of the senior management team, or any other official. There was every opportunity to do so - Sally was given separate briefing, and attended most of the internal Ministerial meetings on Iraq, including those that determined our policy approach and our resource strategy.

2. DFID - like other Government Departments - has drawn on all available resources to meet a unique set of challenges in the most difficult of political circumstances.

3. We planned to the greatest extent possible for the anticipated humanitarian crisis in Iraq. Our preparations began at least six months before the conflict itself and comprised three strands: (i) discussions with MOD on the possible humanitarian consequences and immediate needs during the conflict phase itself; (ii) behind the scene discussions with the UN agencies on possible scenarios and responses; and (iii) internal contingency planning for DFID's role. We also held discussions with US colleagues and other donor partners.

4. These discussions led to: (i) direct funding for MOD's anticipated humanitarian responsibilities; (ii) secondment of DFID humanitarian advisers to UK military; (iii) DFID funding for UN agencies, ICRC and international NGOs to pre-position emergency supplies and to respond to the emerging situation on the ground.

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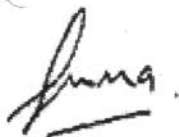
5. In the event, thankfully, there has not been a humanitarian crisis in the traditional sense. Instead, the post-conflict difficulties have all been related to a breakdown in civil order. As you know, looting, sabotage and targeted attacks against the Coalition continue. The implementing partners DFID advised and funded were well placed to respond, and have sought to restore public services quickly in spite of this insecurity, with reasonable success. CPA has a critical role to play in the recovery and reconstruction process. Alongside others in Whitehall, we have committed, and continue to commit, significant support to CPA in Baghdad (where things are difficult) and Basrah (where things are better). But the overall situation remains fragile due to insecurity, and under-investment in Iraq public services over the last decade.

6. Overall, I am satisfied that my teams have done their very best in difficult political and operational circumstance. This is not to say that some things could not have been done better both in DFID and in Whitehall. We have already participated in lesson learning exercises with MOD and Cabinet Office, and will also take stock internally. I would be happy to share the outcomes of these exercises in due course if it would be useful.

7. I would like to emphasise that there is a culture of openness in the Department. There was much internal discussion at all levels in the Department throughout the Iraq crisis. It is disappointing that Sally Keeble did not feel able to contribute to this in a more positive way as a Minister and that she should write in this way only after the reshuffle.

8. I attach more detailed notes on the three specific areas of concern Sally raised. I would be happy for this letter and the attachment to be copied to Number 10. I understand Valerie Amos will be writing a personal letter to the Prime Minister. Please do let me know if we should draft a response from the Prime Minister to Sally Keeble or if he wants to handle this on the political net.

Yours,



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Iraq: Areas of Concern Raised in Sally Keeble's Letter

(i) Organisational and staffing arrangements

In recognition of the importance of the issue to the Government, DFID moved very swiftly to put together a high calibre and senior Iraq team. We instructed the immediate transfer of key officials into the Iraq teams at short notice – the Senior Civil Service heads of both the Iraq Humanitarian and Reconstruction teams as well as most of the members of the team were recruited in this way. Because of our relatively small bilateral development programme in Iraq over the previous decade, not surprisingly few DFID staff had previous experience of working in Iraq. However, all were development professionals, many with previous experience of working in post-conflict environments. In the event, they have worked tirelessly in the most difficult circumstances.

We also set up very early on a dedicated information and briefing unit. This handled incoming information, internal briefings, parliamentary and public interest. Material collated from public sources, our international partners and our own field staff was analysed by the teams here in DFID and informed our policy and programming work. We did not build capacity to monitor the Arab media because other Departments had that capacity, and we could utilise their analysis.

One constraint, particularly early on, was the limited opportunity for DFID to participate in Whitehall discussions. This hampered our own planning to some extent, but more importantly, complicated our efforts to be joined up with the rest of Government.

(ii) Management of financial aid

DFID used financial resources to meet the emerging humanitarian needs as required. Financial assistance was used to support preparation and pre-positioning of supplies before the conflict itself; to respond to the UN flash appeal; and to support NGO interventions. The pattern and timing of approvals and disbursements reflected circumstances and needs on the ground, and the emerging nature of the crisis. Hence, for example, we agreed even before the conflict some £30m with the Red Cross Movement – £15m of this was earmarked to address refugee movements into neighbouring countries. In the event, this has not been needed, and will be vired to other purposes. At a broader level, we have contributed more than our usual share to the UN agencies, and contributed less to NGOs in this crisis – this reflects their respective operational capacities in Iraq.

Alongside support to the UN and other agencies, DFID pre-positioned limited supplies in the region to fill emergency gaps in the broader humanitarian response. In the event, these were not needed. Non-perishable goods such as tents and blankets will now be used for the next crisis. Perishable supplies, such as the medicines, have been distributed through UN agencies.

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With last week's announcement of a further £35m contribution to the revised UN appeal, DFID has approved a total of £154m, of which £87m has been disbursed, with the remainder to be disbursed as soon as it can sensibly be spent. A further £56m is available for emerging needs in the current financial year, and some £55m of the £60m earmarked in the Reserve can be drawn on as and when needed. (The balance of £5m was allocated to the FCO with DFID agreement to cover the cost of deploying Whitehall secondees to CPA.) The principle of sensible disbursement is an important one – i.e. for the purpose of effective impact rather than speed in its own right. The issue in Iraq at the moment is not really one of resources, but of operational capacity and security.

In short, our management of financial aid in this crisis has rightly been driven by needs on the ground and our professional assessment of what is required. At each stage, DFID spending plans have been announced in Parliament and published in regular newsletters.

(iii) Engagement with CPA

DFID support to CPA has grown dramatically; and continues to do so. In early April when CPA (ORHA as was) moved to Baghdad, DFID had one official in CPA. That has grown to 16 today split between Baghdad and Basrah, and will rise upwards of 30 over the coming weeks – some 30% of the total UK contingent. In the South, DFID has already placed an office management team with operating funds to enhance CPA-S capacity; and a project team with £5m of programme funds will deploy by the end of this week.

DFID secondees into CPA have been successful in work areas ranging from food distribution to refugee returns. Their success is based on thorough groundwork done beforehand to ensure they have substantive roles, the skill set they bring to their tasks, and professional support and back up from London.

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