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*Jean Harriet,*

**IRAQ INQUEST BACKLOG**

Thank you for your letter and progress report dated July 06 that outlines the significant advances that have been made regarding outstanding Iraq inquests.

I was pleased to note that the recruitment of the agreed additional posts has now taken place. It is clear from the feedback from our regular contact with the Oxfordshire Coroner that he is confident that the backlog of current military inquests should be cleared by the end of the year. This is very welcome news.

In order to maintain this momentum of progress, the MOD will ensure that Boards of Inquiry reports will be forwarded to Mr Gardiner at the earliest opportunity. Indeed, we have recently offered Mr Gardiner a direct point of contact within MOD to expedite or assist in the resolution of any issue he might have associated with Boards of Inquiry.

As I indicated previously, given these inquests are a result of operational commitments, my preference would be for the additional funding to be sought through a call against the Reserve. I stand ready to support such a request to HM Treasury if necessary. Should such central funding be unforthcoming, I am in principle willing to provide a contribution of £125,000 for the first year towards the financial costs of the additional resources, subject to Accounting

The Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP  
Minister of State for Constitutional Affairs

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Officer and HM Treasury approval. I understand our respective staffs have already discussed the transfer of funds under PES arrangements.

I am grateful for your assistance in bringing about a much welcome improvement in this important and sensitive issue. Much remains to be done, however, and it would be useful if inquest dates could be listed for a good number of the outstanding cases in time for your September statement.

  
DES BROWNE

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