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FROM: JOHN BARKER
Corporate Development Group

TEL:
DATE: 1 December 2003

By email

SIR ANDREW TURNBULL

cc. Alice Perkins

IRAQ VOLUNTEERS

*add so
- Friday*
Desmond Bowen has been keeping in touch with the Foreign Secretaries concerns about the possible treatment of Civil Service volunteers in Iraq when they return to the UK. He apparently picked up these concerns talking to the volunteers on his recent visit in Baghdad. I understand that you may be discussing this with Michael Jay tomorrow. You may find it helpful therefore to have a feel for what we are already doing to keep track of what is happening.

2. We have been issuing a questionnaire to volunteers on their return to the UK asking for views about their experience before going, in Iraq and on return. So far we have only had 8 questionnaires returned. Although they have raised a small number of niggles for example in relation to visa problems in Kuwait delaying travel arrangements and to difficulties in getting help to arrange flights home, the overall response has been positive. Volunteers have enjoyed the experience, learned from it, felt proud to have been involved, enjoyed the comradeship and will be happy to recommend others to go out there. None of the questionnaires mention concerns about treatment on return to their department.

3. There may of course be people who have not let us know of difficulties. I am only aware of one individual from Department of Health who has a problem. She came to see me when she was back in the UK for a spell and has e-mailed me since from Iraq. She went out from the Social Care side of the department and is affected by restructuring of the SSI. We are trying to help her find a home when she comes back.

*MT
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all now
x to JD*
4. Nevertheless we should not ignore the concerns of those currently in Iraq. I understand that you might like to write to Permanent Secretary colleagues as well as possibly raising the issue at this week's Wednesday morning meeting. I think that would be helpful particularly if we make sure that volunteers in Iraq are made aware of your letter. We will be happy to provide you with a draft if that is what you would like. I do not think we need do more at this stage than remind colleagues that the volunteers are doing a splendid job in very trying circumstances and will be developing their competences in many of the areas we would want them to. We should ensure that their contribution is recognised and that they do not have grounds for believing that their careers have suffered because of being there. (I am confident that generally speaking people will not suffer – the experience with, for example, the Prince's Trust Volunteers scheme is that promotion rates amongst volunteers are higher than for those not involved.)

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5. We would also plan to use the internal communicators network to get publicity in departments' house journals for positive stories from returners. If they are serious in saying they would recommend the experience that would help keep up the supply of volunteers which is still quite buoyant despite the occasional blip.

[signed]

JOHN BARKER

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