

Sir John Chilcot, opening statement  
29 June 2010

Good morning and welcome to the QEII Conference Centre for the first day of this phase of the Iraq Inquiry's public hearings.

At the Inquiry's launch on 30 July last year, we took on the task of establishing a reliable account of the UK's involvement in Iraq between 2001 and 2009, and to identify lessons for British governments facing similar circumstances.

In the last 11 months, we have covered a great deal of ground.

One of our first priorities was to meet, and listen to, the families of British citizens and members of the armed forces who died in Iraq. 48 families came to talk to us. We learned much from them. Their sacrifice and concerns remain in our thoughts, and inform our approach.

Between 24 November last year and 8 March, we heard from more than 80 witnesses in public sessions. We heard first hand from senior military personnel and officials involved in providing advice on the policy in Iraq or responsible for its implementation; and from senior Ministers, including the then Prime Minister, Mr Brown, and the former Prime Minister, Mr Blair. Our purpose was to establish a broad chronology of what had happened from 2001 to the withdrawal of combat forces in 2009.

Those hearings gave us a complementary perspective to the papers which the Government has provided. We have received many thousands of documents and that process is continuing.

A number of documents were declassified and published on our website to provide relevant context in the earlier hearings. We will continue to take that approach. Accordingly, further documents are being released to support this morning's hearing.

As we made clear at the launch, the Inquiry is independent. We have made a deliberate choice to conduct our work in a way which seeks to remain outside Party politics. That is why we ended the first round of public hearings before the launch of the general election campaign.

In May, the Inquiry held private discussions in France and the USA. Details of those visits can be found on our website.<sup>1</sup>

We have also held hearings in private with British officials, diplomats and military officers to take evidence on those issues, such as intelligence, which cannot be heard in public. Details about whom we have seen in those hearings will be published in the next week or so.

We have also held meetings with less senior service personnel, civil servants and diplomats who have served in Iraq. They too have given us very helpful insights into both their achievements, and the challenges they faced, whilst serving in Iraq between 2003 and 2009.

The Inquiry has issued an open invitation to international lawyers to comment on the grounds relied on by the British Government in undertaking military action in Iraq.<sup>2</sup> The Inquiry also continues to receive, and welcomes, submissions from the public on all matters relevant to its terms of reference.

These hearings which begin today will cover a range of issues. In some cases, they will be complementing evidence we have already heard. In others, we will be pursuing issues which have only been touched on in earlier evidence. This morning we will be hearing our first witness from the police.

Other areas we will be covering in detail for the first time include military equipment and personnel issues.

The Inquiry may hold a further round of public hearings in the Autumn. We will take a final decision on that later.

As we have said before, we intend to complete our report around the turn of the year. We remain committed to a transparent, open, thorough and fair process and conducting the Inquiry in a cost effective way.

We intend to deliver a reliable and authoritative report about the UK's decision to take military action in Iraq and the events that followed; and to identify lessons for the future.

1. The inquiry also held private meetings in London with General Petraeus and Walter Slocombe during their recent visits to the UK.

General Petraeus was Commander of 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) 2003-4; commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I) 2004-5 and overall commander of Multi-National Force – Iraq 2007-8. Walter Slocombe was Senior Adviser and Director for Security Affairs (National Security and Defense) to the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003. These meetings were on the same terms as the meetings the Inquiry held in the United States. The inquiry will shortly publish on its website a full list of those non British nationals it saw on these terms.

2. To target those with relevant knowledge and expertise, the invitation has been placed on the website of the British Institute for International and Comparative Law, and circulated to the membership of the Oxford University Public International Law Discussion Group.