



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
10, Downing Street
London SW1

16th June 2003

Dear Tony,

Following our phone conversation, I want to set out my misgivings about DFID's performance in dealing with the humanitarian consequences of the action in Iraq. My concern is that if there is ever a situation like this again, the Government cannot have a repeat of that performance.

- ① There were two main tasks in preparing for the aftermath of the war. One was the complex political task of preparing for the transition to a new, ideally democratic, government. ② The other was the practical task of service reconstruction and provision. My main interest was in the second task, in which DFID had a very immediate role and which I care passionately about.

There were of course difficulties because of Clare's position. Some of the consequences of her decisions were disastrous, specifically: the lack of pre-planning, the difficulties in providing humanitarian supplies for the troops, the refusal to contribute £6 million towards the dredging of Um Qasr and the refusal to engage fully with ORHA.

However, quite apart from the political difficulties, there were also real difficulties with the performance of the department at official level. There were three main areas:

i) Organisational and staffing arrangements

Firstly, I was dubious about the staffing arrangements that were made to deal with the crisis. At operational level there were two key teams, both of which I visited. One team monitored the humanitarian situation. They did a thorough job in terms of getting information from NGOs, and English language TV. However, it was not clear how in practical terms the information was being used, since DFID did not at the time have a framework for action. Because the people in the team had humanitarian rather than language skills, they could not monitor Arab media. The other team was a policy team, pulled together after the action had started. Only one team member had previously worked on Iraq, and said her experience

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was limited. The team seemed to be operating under great difficulties, and I was very concerned about the level of experience and support it had, and the general morale. I would have expected DFID to set up in advance of the military action a solid team, with the management support and facilities needed to operate quickly and effectively on an issue that was such a high priority for Government.

ii) Management of financial aid

Secondly, the management of financial and other assistance gave me cause for concern. Of the £210 million available to the Department, £115 million has been allocated, and £95 million kept to meet emerging needs. Of the £115 million allocated, some £97 million of spending has been agreed. The level disbursed is lower – the last time I asked it was £70 million. An amount of money had been earmarked to meet the refugee crisis that never in fact materialised. The money is supposed to have been reallocated, but the details are unclear. The £60 million provided by the Treasury from Government reserves was at one stage being regarded as a general pool for humanitarian bids by other departments, although I think with Valerie's arrival, that has changed.

I would have expected forward planning for the £210 million to be allocated in regular tranches, and then, given the domestic interest, for the spend to be closely monitored and regularly reported. Certainly I would have expected most of the £210 million to have been allocated by now, with a spend profile to go through to the next phase of reconstruction. For that a more complex financial package will be needed.

There was also confused information about what happened to DFID's humanitarian supplies. Some supplies, including emergency medical kits were flown out to Kuwait, and at a later date were, I believe, passed over to the military. Again, I would have expected careful planning and monitoring of the supplies, with clear reporting, especially given the interest in health conditions in Iraq.

iii) Engagement with CPA

Thirdly, after Clare left, I had expected that there would be a much more rapid re-engagement of DFID with the CPA. The Department had access to most of the skills that were needed to help the CPA with service reconstruction, either in-house or via call-down arrangements. The Department has an international reputation for expertise in policy and experience, and this should have been fully deployed from the start as part of the coalition effort. Although there has been progress, it has been slow. I know that there are a lot of reservations across Whitehall about the performance of the CPA. However, as part of the coalition our reputation will, to an extent, stand or fall with that of the US, and the reputation of the CPA in reconstruction in the aftermath of the war was always going to be critical.

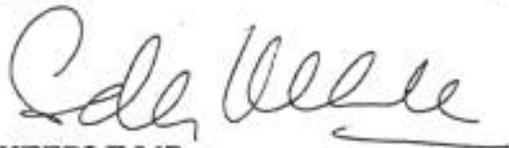
The question is where do we go from here. Things in Iraq are moving on, and despite the continuing security problem, services are starting to recover. There has been some heroic work done by agencies on the ground. With a bit of luck the under-performance of DFID will be glossed over with the passage of time. I certainly hope so.

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In any similar situation in the future, I would expect DFID to do the pre-planning, mobilise the human resources, and utilise the financial aid to contribute to meeting the humanitarian needs in an organised, efficient and accountable manner. I would expect the department to do this as full members of HMG, and also fully accepting our commitments to our international allies.

For my own part however, I remain deeply concerned by the way in which the humanitarian effort was handled, and the failure to deliver practical support at the time it was needed. I pondered deeply throughout the crisis how it might be possible to change the course of events. As I said, I had pretty much made up my mind to resign after the war. But then when Clare did, it was impossible without getting muddled up with her political agenda. However, I found it very difficult working in a department that had under-performed on such a key issue and where, as a minister, I was, for a variety of reasons, prevented from helping to shape the course of events.

Yours sincerely,



SALLY KEEBLE MP
NORTHAMPTON NORTH

