



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Margaret Aldred
Secretary
The Iraq Inquiry
35 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BQ

14 December 2009

Dear Margaret,

As requested in your letter of 11 December, I enclose a signed witness undertaking in respect of the Inquiry hearing on 25 November. (You might like to note that there are still minor typographical errors in the final transcript of the morning session: at page 3, line 1 and page 5 lines 11-12).

I would like to take this opportunity to add a personal statement to my evidence in respect of the Government's dossier of September 2002, in the light of continuing assertions in the media that its drafters deliberately presented an exaggerated or otherwise inaccurate picture.

I of course accept the Butler Committee's conclusions that the September dossier was significantly flawed – not least because it was in some key respects based on information which subsequently proved to be false. But I want to emphasise that, to my knowledge, the officials who worked on the text did so in good faith.

We were very conscious that the dossier's contents would be subjected to exceptionally close scrutiny after its publication. It had been some six months since the Prime Minister had first undertaken to publish such an assessment at an appropriate time. There had been persistent pressure from the media and in Parliament to set a publication date. We therefore knew that the dossier was keenly anticipated; interest was further increased when the International Institute for Strategic Studies presented its own assessment in early September.

The drafters were well aware that there were members of the specialist press who had spent many years researching Iraq's WMD programmes and who, we thought, would be quick to point out any weaknesses or inaccuracies in our judgements. We

also knew that some other governments – above all the Iraqis themselves - would have a strong interest in undermining our conclusions. In those circumstances, we had every reason to include in the dossier only material which we felt confident would stand up to scrutiny, and every reason not to present a consciously exaggerated picture.

The dossier also continues to be described in the media as making a “case for war”. I would like to repeat my comment to the Inquiry that I did not then (and still do not) regard it as intended to do that. It certainly supported the Government’s case for renewed international action to address the challenge posed by Saddam Hussein. But in September 2002 the action we were seeking was the return of UN inspectors to Iraq.

Yours ever,


Tim Dowse