

Public hearings: Sir John Chilcot's closing statement, 30 July 2010
30 July 2010

As we close this round of public hearings, my colleagues and I believe this is an opportune moment to set out what the Inquiry has done so far and what it intends to do next.

It is now exactly a year since we launched the Iraq Inquiry. In this time, we have held two rounds of public hearings and a number of private hearings – in all over 140 witnesses. Each of the public witness sessions can be seen, and the transcripts read, on our website (www.iraqinquiry.org.uk), where we have also published the witness statements and a considerable number of documents. It is a substantial archive of evidence. This is on top of the thousands of government documents which we hold. Taken together, they have given us an emerging picture of the UK's involvement in Iraq between 2001 and 2009.

This round of hearings has been extremely useful. It has offered us the opportunity to hear new perspectives on issues which we had previously only covered in part. We have also taken evidence on new subjects such as building policing capacity in Iraq, military personnel issues and the provision of military equipment. The public evidence sessions have demonstrated the value of hearing at first hand from those directly involved in, and responsible for, policy decisions and implementation.

Outside the formal evidence sessions, the Inquiry is gathering information and insights from a wide range of sources. We have talked informally to over a hundred military personnel, civil servants and diplomats who served on the ground in Iraq and we hope to hear from more of their colleagues later in the year. We have spoken to foreign citizens who have insight about the UK's involvement in Iraq between 2001 and 2009. My colleagues and I are also mindful of the issues raised with us last year by the bereaved families of those British citizens and members of the British Armed Forces who died in Iraq.

Over the coming months, we will be analysing and integrating all this evidence and information as we begin to write our report. As we do this, we may find conflicts or gaps within the evidence. If we do, we will need to consider how best to get to the bottom of what actually happened. This may be through seeking additional written evidence or- where we wish to probe more deeply- through holding further hearings possibly recalling witnesses from whom we have heard before. **If - and I stress the word "if" -** we decide to do this, these hearings would probably take place in the late autumn.

The Inquiry also hopes to visit Iraq. We want to see for ourselves the consequences of UK involvement, to hear Iraqi perspectives and to understand the prospects for Iraq today. For the security of both the Inquiry team and those whom we wish to meet, we shall not publish any further details in advance of a visit. If we are able to visit Iraq, we shall provide a summary afterwards, as with our other overseas visits.

As I have said, over the past year we have gathered a large body of evidence for the Committee's report. It is worth recalling what this report is, and is not, designed to do. We are here to establish a reliable account of the UK's involvement in Iraq between 2001 and 2009 and to identify lessons for British Governments facing critical decisions or operations overseas of a similar kind in the future. As we have said repeatedly, the Inquiry is not a court of law; no one is on trial.

We intend to report around the turn of the year. The report will include that material which is necessary to explain what happened; and how and why we have reached our conclusions. If that involves classified or currently unpublished material, we will seek declassification in accordance with the published protocol we have agreed with the government.

I reiterate the commitment that our report will be full, thorough, evidence-based and frank. Looking to the future, we shall make recommendations about the way such matters are handled in the future.

I would like to close this session by thanking those who have assisted the Committee in carrying out this round of public hearings. We are immensely grateful to the QE2 for hosting us; to Bowtie for enabling our proceedings to be broadcast on television and through the web and to Merrill Legal Solutions for their continuous and rapid transcription. And with that, I bring this hearing to a close.