



file

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Prime Minister's Press Office

29 May 2003

Dear Mr. Damazar,

RADIO FOUR TODAY PROGRAMME

In the absence abroad of my colleague Tom Kelly, I would like to register our concern at the failure of this morning's Today programme to contact Downing Street for a response to Andrew Gilligan's story which made serious and untrue allegations about this office over the presentation of a dossier relating to Iraq.

What is of further concern is that Today continued to run these allegations, at the top of every news bulletin, without any reference to the firm denial provided voluntarily by Downing Street after we first heard the story. This absence of any balancing comment continued despite our duty press officer calling the programme no less than four times. While John Humphrys did finally refer to our statement in his two-way with Andrew Gilligan, this is not the same, as I am sure you will accept, as making clear we categorically denied the story in your news bulletins.

I am also concerned that the World at One declined to interview Adam Ingram, the Minister for the Armed Forces, on their programme today on the grounds that he is not a member of the Cabinet. He is, however, the Minister responding for the Government on this issue and without his appearance I am unclear how the programme thought it could present a balanced piece on this issue. I notice, too, that WATO also failed, for some reason, to carry Downing Street's quote that, 'Any suggestion that there was any pressure or intervention from Downing Street is entirely false' which had been used on other broadcasters and newspapers.

I should add that we categorically deny the allegations made. But our complaint goes beyond this. The BBC's guidelines spell out clearly your obligations to present balanced reporting. I would like to hear from you how you

CAB/1/0154

8

believe these standards have been met when your reporters failed to give this office a chance in advance to respond to allegations and ignored denials when they were provided.

I would be interested to receive your comments on these issues.

Yours sincerely,

ANNE SHEVAS

Mr. Mark Damazer
Deputy Director BBC News
By Fax: 0208 576 7120

CAB/1/0155