



10 DOWNING STREET

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LOBBY BRIEFING MONDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2002TEACHERS RECEPTION

The Prime Minister's Official Spokesman informed journalists that the Prime Minister would be hosting a teachers' reception at Downing Street in the evening. The reception was an opportunity for the Prime Minister to thank those working in primary and secondary education and was one of a series of receptions for public sector workers. Around 200 teachers and teaching assistants from all parts of the UK were expected to attend.

IRAQ - MEETINGS

The PMOS told journalists that the Prime Minister had seen Bruce George, Chairman of the Defence Committee, this morning as part of the series of meetings he was holding with Commons figures. He would see Ann Taylor, Chair of the Intelligence Committee, later in the week. And had seen the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Donald Anderson, last week. Asked if there were any plans for the Prime Minister to meet Labour backbenchers, the PMOS said no but that MPs would have an opportunity to have their say during the debate next week.

IRAQ - RECALL OF PARLIAMENT

Asked to clarify the position regarding a vote at the end of next week's debate given Jack Straw's words on Sunday in which he talked about the Commons "reaching a conclusion", the PMOS said there had been no change at all in the position. It remained the case that it would be an adjournment debate. Asked what time the House would be meeting, the PMOS said 11 00 am until 10 30 pm.

IRAQ - DOSSIER

Asked whether the timing of publication of the dossier, on the very morning of that Parliament resumed, was deliberate in order to do everything on one day, or whether it was because the dossier would not be ready before then, the PMOS said that the publication had been moved onto a faster track than originally intended and that had caused some difficulties. The intention was, as Jack Straw had said yesterday, to give people as good an insight as possible without comprising intelligence. It was expected to take up until the morning of September 24 to get the dossier ready. Asked if the Cabinet would have it when it met on Monday September 23, the PMOS said it was unclear whether a version would be available for that meeting since we were working to very tight deadlines.

Asked for details of the publication process, the PMOS said it would be published at 8 am on Tuesday September 24. Asked if there would be a news conference, or if it would be given to newspapers the night before, the PMOS said plans had yet to be finalised. Asked how MPs would get copies, the PMOS said precise arrangements were still being settled. Asked how many pages it was likely to be, was it more likely to be 50 or 500 pages, the PMOS said he couldn't go for 500 but it was quite a detailed and comprehensive document.

IRAQ - INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Asked whether the Government saw the latest comments from the Saudi Foreign Minister as a toughening the Saudi position and if so were did it welcome them, the PMOS said the Government welcomed the acceptance that the issue had to be dealt with and that the UN was the next stage. This was a common view and one that was widely shared. It was recognised that the decision by the President of the USA to go down the UN route was welcomed but it had to be so that UN dealt with the issue rather than avoided it. Pressed on whether the apparently more positive stance taken by the Saudis for the use of their territory for military operations, the PMOS said it was for the Saudis to speak for themselves but we welcomed their acceptance that this was an issue that had to be dealt with.

Asked his understanding of whether that there would have to be two UN resolutions before any action was taken, one to set a deadline and another to "press the trigger", the PMOS said we were getting into hypotheticals. The Government had an open mind, but what was important was that Saddam got the message that he either had to co-operate and let the UN inspectors in or face the consequences. It was up to him to decide. The important point, whatever procedural route was adopted, was that he got that message loud and clear.

Asked if there were any plans for the Prime Minister to visit European capitals this week, in particular whether he had plans to see President Chirac, the PMOS said no but reminded journalists that on Friday the Prime Minister had spoken to President Chirac, Prime Minister Balkenende of the Netherlands, and Danish Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen. Asked if