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Director of Communications and Strategy

5 July 2003

Dear Mr Gleeson

In advance of your meeting to discuss the allegations that were made against the Government on the Today programme on May 29, and subsequent events, I thought it would be helpful to send you the enclosed.

It sets out, as fully as possible, how the Government has sought to deal with this issue since the allegations were first broadcast. I have included all the correspondence between myself and the BBC, and between colleagues in Government and the BBC. You will see from this that these serious allegations were not put to us in advance. You will see the swift denial, made with the backing of the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, which had little or no effect upon subsequent reporting. You will see also that we did strive to resolve this privately. You will also see, from the exchanges the BBC has had both in correspondence and on air with Geoff Hoon and Ben Bradshaw, that we strongly dispute the BBC claims that the allegations were put to us before broadcast.

I am assuming that you will have been provided with all the relevant transcripts of evidence through the Foreign Affairs Committee. You will find in this file documentation referred to in the paragraph above and a transcript of the Thursday May 29 broadcast. I have also attached the text of Mr Gilligan's Mail on Sunday article of Sunday 1 June.

I am sorry to have sent you so much material, but I think it important, particularly in light of the way recent BBC reporting following Mr Gilligan's evidence to the FAC has sought to redefine the allegations, that you have all this material to hand.

I note from press cuttings that the BBC views my complaint as an attack upon the independence of the BBC. I want to assure you that is not the case. I respect the BBC's independence. I believe the BBC is one of the country's