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Special Advisers

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
ROOM 205 OLD WAR OFFICE BUILDING  
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2EL

Telephone 020 721 82111/2/3  
Fax 020 721 87140  
Email: defencesecretary@defence.mod.uk

MO 6/17/15C

2 July 2003

Dear Richard,

My attention has been drawn to your letter of 29 June to Ben Bradshaw and I would like to correct a number of specific points relating to the MOD

During his interview on the Today Programme with Ben Bradshaw on 28 June John Humphrys said that Andrew Gilligan 'checked with the Ministry of Defence' before broadcasting his story. This is simply not true, as the record below makes clear

Shortly after that interview was broadcast, at 8.50am, Andrew Gilligan called the MOD duty press officer. Two press officers were present as this was during the handover period. Mr Gilligan said he was calling to 'note that he had spoken to the Chief Press Officer before the programme was broadcast and that was what he had said'. He then rang off without offering any explanation.

I deduce from this call that the basis for John Humphrys' claim that the story was 'checked with the MOD' is the conversation Mr Gilligan had with the Chief Press Officer at approximately 6.30pm on 28 May

Richard Sambrook Esc  
Director, BBC News  
BBC TV Centre  
Wood Lane  
London  
W12 7RJ

MOD/g/0014

As we have already made clear, the conversation on 28 May was actually about a piece on the use of cluster bombs in Iraq and a possible interview bid for Adam Ingram. Mr Gilligan did not discuss any other story. He was asked whether he was working on anything else for the programme. He then mentioned that he was working on something else about WMD. He did not discuss any detail of this story, he did not put any questions about it to the MOD and most importantly, he said that this was not a story for the MOD. By his own admission he did not regard MOD as the relevant Government department. I cannot see how this can be described as 'checking the story'.

Although Mr Gilligan has already told us that he believes this was the relevant conversation, your letter to Ben Bradshaw also lists other conversations between the MOD and the Today Programme on 28 May and suggests that these conversations were about WMD. The times and details of all out-of-hours calls to the MOD Press Office are logged. This record shows that your account is inaccurate.

8 00pm - call from Ian Watson confirming that the Today Programme definitely wanted Adam Ingram on the programme.

10 30pm - call from Chris Howard asking if Adam Ingram would do two minutes on WMD at the end of the interview on cluster bombs. The two running issues about WMD at the time were comments made by Donald Rumsfeld earlier and the second WMD briefing paper. He did not mention dossiers and he said he did not know the detail of the piece.

Finally, you suggest that Adam Ingram must have known about the piece in advance because he was able to answer questions on the programme. You will recall that Mr Gilligan's first item on the story ran at 6 07am. This broadcast was the first time anyone in MOD was aware of the 45 minutes/dossier story.

MOD/9/0015

This information shows that either you are deliberately misleading us or that you yourself are being misled. I would be grateful for a response once you have checked this information provided above with the relevant staff.

*Yours sincerely,  
Geoff*

GEOFFREY HOON

MOD/9/0016