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THE PRIME MINISTER

30 October 2007

Dear Mr Eubank

Thank you for your letter of 21 August forwarded to me via your solicitors, Statham Gill Davies of 54 Welbeck Street, London, W1G 9XS.

We recognise that many continue to disagree about the UK's involvement in the Iraq conflict. As the previous Prime Minister made clear, no decision he ever made in politics was as difficult as the decision to undertake military action there, and he has never lacked respect for those who disagreed with him. But the Government still believes that it made the right judgement in removing the threat Saddam Hussein posed. Under Saddam Hussein, extremely grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law were widespread. Torture, arbitrary and summary killings, rape and persecution of Kurdish and Shia communities were hallmarks of Saddam's dictatorship.

There has been political progress in Iraq: agreement on a constitution, successful elections and establishment of a four-year government of national unity. After decades of repression, Iraqis have voted for a democratic government that is representative of the communities within Iraq. Sectarian violence has undermined efforts to improve security, promote national reconciliation and ensure effective government. Dealing with these issues is a huge challenge which the Government of Iraq must work hard to overcome. It is vital that we and international partners remain steadfast in our support for them.

Iraq is a sovereign nation and our troops remain there at the request of the elected Iraqi Government, and with the support of successive UN Security Council Resolutions. Our strategy all along has been clear – to hand over lead responsibility for security to Iraqi Forces as their capability and conditions allow. This is part of our wider objective to establish a successful democratic Iraq. Three out of four

provinces under UK control have now been transferred to Iraqi security control and we expect Basra province to transfer later in the year. As Iraq's security forces and civilian authorities are able to take on increasing responsibility for delivering security, so international forces will be able to step back. UK forces will stay no longer than they are needed or wanted by the Iraqi government.

All casualties suffered by UK Forces are a source of profound regret. UK personnel have put their lives on the line to help the Iraqis build a strong, stable Iraq and we cannot pay high enough tribute to the job they are doing, or the sacrifice some of them have made.

I also believe that all civilian deaths in Iraq are a tragedy. There is no denying that thousands of Iraqis have lost their lives through violence in the last three years. The terrorist groups operating in Iraq deliberately target civilians. People are dying at the hands of those who choose violence to pursue their aims. In contrast, the UN mandated Multi-National Force (MNF) seeks at all times to avoid causing civilian casualties. All operations are aimed against legitimate military targets and all possible steps are taken to minimise civilian deaths. Iraq's leaders, with the help of the MNF, are promoting democracy and freedom. We support that and their efforts to reduce violence and build a stable and secure country.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gen", written in a cursive style.

Mr Chris Eubank