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SECRETARY OF STATE

D/S of S/GH 2708/04/L

23 June 2004

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 28 May on behalf of your constituent, Ms [REDACTED] about the recent allegations of human rights abuses in Iraq.

I would first like to address the issue of representations made by the UK to the US regarding the treatment of detainees. The Prime Minister's Human Rights envoy, Ann Clwyd, has visited Iraq on at least two occasions and has visited US facilities. On one occasion she raised concerns about the US treatment of a prisoner with senior UK Commanders who, in turn, raised it with their US counterparts.

By the time UK officials were aware of the specific allegations involving US Forces, detailed investigations had already been initiated by the US authorities. President Bush and the US Defense Secretary have already expressed their distress and regret about the US treatment of prisoners. The Defense Secretary has announced that there are at least half a dozen enquiries ongoing to find those responsible and to bring them to justice. I have every confidence that they will work to ensure there is no repeat.

In your letter you specifically ask what assurances the UK has sought and received that such behaviour by all of the Coalition Forces will not be tolerated and how this will be monitored in the future. I must make clear that Coalition Forces do not tolerate behaviour of the kind to which you refer. The investigations referred to above are testimony to the fact that procedures are

The Rt Hon John Denham MP
[REDACTED]



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in place to ensure that those who are guilty of such behaviour are brought to justice.

You also mention that Ms [REDACTED] is particularly concerned over the use of hooding on Iraqi detainees. Hooding, as a temporary means of detaining and transporting prisoners, was used earlier during operations in Iraq. This was in line with UK policy as we believe that, where there is a strong operational rationale, this is acceptable under the terms of the Geneva Conventions. However, hooding has not been used during interrogations. This is in line with the 'Heath Ruling' of 1972 against certain interrogation techniques. Hooding is now not being used by UK troops in Iraq in any circumstances. Since there has been no breach of policy, there is no need for disciplinary action.

The Armed Forces are fully aware of their obligations under international law and, in particular, with regard to the Geneva Conventions. They receive thorough mandatory training courses which include specific guidance on handling Prisoners of War. All personnel must attend refresher training every year. Before going to Iraq, all personnel are briefed on the Rules of Engagement and procedures for dealing with Prisoners of War or other detainees. Each combat unit is required to have senior non-commissioned officers trained in handling Prisoners of War. In addition, units responsible for the routine handling of detainees, conduct further specialist training.

Promoting human rights and international humanitarian law is a vital part of what we are doing in Iraq. The fall of Saddam Hussein was an opportunity to end decades of abuse. We continue to work towards building a free and democratic Iraq in which human rights and the rule of law are a reality for all the Iraqi people.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

GEOFFREY HOON