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Our ref: 7/0014

Ms Veronica Wadley
The Editor
The Evening Standard
Northcliffe House
2 Derry Street, Kensington
LONDON W8 5EE

15th January 2004

Dear Ms Wadley,

Thank you for the letter of 14th January from you and a number of media editors asking that you might see a copy of my report before the time of publication.

I have given careful consideration to your request and to the reasons which you state in support of it. I fully appreciate that the task of the Evening Standard and other news organisations who will have to produce headlines and reports very soon after the publication of my report will be a difficult and responsible one. But weighing the matter I have decided that there are powerful considerations against giving any news organisation a prior view of the report before publication (no matter what conditions or embargoes might be imposed), and that the fairest course is to present the report to everyone (with the exception of the parties who will see it 24 hours in advance subject to strict undertakings as to confidentiality) at the same time.

I have already received a communication from the Leader of the House of Commons, Mr Peter Hain MP, that a Member of Parliament has stated in the House of Commons that it would be wholly inappropriate for the report to be made available to the media before it was made available to Members of Parliament. In addition there is the very real difficulty that if a limited number of news organisations were given a prior view, other news organisations would ask for the same privilege for the same or similar reasons and it would be very difficult to draw a fair and valid distinction between the various media organisations.

You say in your letter “Our fear is that this arrangement will make it much more difficult to produce accurate, detailed and fair reports and lend undue influence to the spinners.” However the first notice of the contents of my report will be when I will make a statement (which will be broadcast on radio and television) in the Royal Courts of Justice summarising the contents of my report and its conclusions on 28th January. In that statement I will be seeking to summarise the report as clearly and as fairly as I can, and I intend that this will have a two-fold purpose. First, it will assist those in the media who have to make immediate reports and prepare immediate headlines. Secondly, my summary will make it more difficult for any party or other body or person subsequently to “spin” the contents and the conclusions of the report.

I am sorry to have to reply to your letter in a negative way, but, as I have said, I have given the matter detailed and careful consideration.

[signed by Lord Hutton]