



**CORONER'S INQUESTS INTO THE DEATHS OF  
DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES AND MR DODI AL FAYED**

**THE RT HON BARONESS BUTLER-SLOSS GBE  
Deputy Coroner to the Royal Household and Assistant Deputy Coroner for Surrey**

22<sup>nd</sup> February 2007

(To all Interested Persons)

The Coroner has asked me to write to you to put forward some proposals to assist all interested persons in preparing for the meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> March.

It is impossible to determine prescriptively or finally the areas of inquiry in these inquests. In many inquests, a coroner will follow particular lines of inquiry which are suggested by the evidence as it develops. In these inquests, the Coroner is acutely aware that the evidence may suggest new areas of inquiry or may require her to focus particular attention on certain areas. That could impact on whether it is expedient to call any particular witness.

Attached to this letter is a document entitled 'First Draft of Arrangement of Evidence', which sets out a series of areas of inquiry. The Coroner would stress that it is intended to provide a framework for discussion, and does not express any concluded view.

It is absolutely clear that any coroner who hears the inquests (whether Lady Butler-Sloss or, dependent on the outcome of the judicial review, some other coroner or deputy) will have to hear evidence on the journey of the Mercedes on the evening of 30<sup>th</sup> / 31<sup>st</sup> August 1997 (from the Ritz hotel to the ultimate collision in the underpass at Place de l'Alma). See section I(A) of the 'Arrangement' document. In relation to that area of inquiry, the Coroner would like to put forward for your consideration the attached first draft of a list of witnesses whose evidence she proposes to adduce (whether orally or under Rule 37). In her view, the evidence of those witnesses will almost certainly have to be adduced in any event.

The Coroner has formed the provisional view that the witnesses in the List should be called in the first stage of the inquests. First, they are mostly French witnesses and it is

desirable that those witnesses be called in a coherent bloc and at an early stage. Secondly, it will be important to hear the evidence concerning the journey and the collision in order to determine what other areas of inquiry need to be considered and what other evidence needs to be called.

It is hoped that it will be possible for some of the witness statements of the French witnesses to be agreed and read under Rule 37. The Coroner would be grateful if, over the whole period before the inquests commence, interested persons could give thought to indicating those witnesses whose statements they would now agree. The Coroner also appreciates that the evidence of some witnesses might be agreed after the inquests have commenced. Of course, the evidence of some witnesses may have to be read if the witnesses do not or cannot attend to give evidence.

After the evidence concerning the journey has been heard, the Coroner proposes to call evidence on the aftermath of the collision. The material topics appear in sections I(B) to I(H) of the Arrangement document. The evidence on these topics logically falls to be considered after the evidence on the journey. It may be possible for much of that evidence to be agreed and read.

Subject to the views of all the interested persons, the Coroner hopes that the events of 31<sup>st</sup> August 1997 before the departure from the Ritz (i.e. the activities of the deceased from their arrival at Le Bourget) may be largely uncontroversial. She proposes to ask one of the investigating officers from Operation Paget to make a statement concerning those events, and to submit it to the interested persons for their comments. If a core of agreed matters could appear in such a statement, it would provide the tribunal with the necessary evidential background to the journey of the Mercedes.

After evidence has been heard concerning the journey and its aftermath, the Coroner proposes to convene a hearing to consider the evidence to be called on the allegations and concerns raised by Mr Al Fayed and others. It is very likely that the inquests will have to inquire, to an extent at least, into the following areas: the Princess of Wales's alleged fears for her life; the suggestion that she was pregnant; the embalming of her body and its purpose; and the acquisition by Dodi Al-Fayed of a ring on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1997. The inquest may also have to inquire further into such areas as: the identity of the driver of the unidentified white Fiat Uno; any cars which may have blocked the route of the Mercedes; the cause or operation of any 'strobe light' (although some of those matters are likely to come into play in the consideration of the journey itself). The Coroner feels that she will be in a much better position to consider which of these areas of inquiry she should focus upon and which witnesses she should call in relation to these areas after she has inquired into the final journey and the collision.

At the meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> March, the following matters can be considered:

- (a) any administrative consequences of the judgment of the Administrative Court;
- (b) preliminary discussion of the areas of inquiry and the list of witnesses concerning the journey;
- (c) a review of expert evidence and of the computer aided depiction of the route.

It is thus not the Coroner's intention to use to the hearing on 5<sup>th</sup> March finally to identify even the areas into which detailed inquiry at the inquest will follow, still less a list of witnesses to be called.

It is likely to be necessary to convene a further hearing after 5<sup>th</sup> March and before the inquests proper. The Coroner would also invite you to communicate by letter over time, concerning the witnesses whom you wish her to call and the witnesses whose statements you can agree. She does not intend to rule out the calling of any witnesses, or to set down any prescriptive and self-limiting definition of the 'scope of the inquests', before the inquests begin. At stages in the inquests, she will invite submissions concerning the areas of inquiry to be addressed.

If any of the above proposed arrangements needs to be revised in view of the forthcoming judgment in the judicial review proceedings, I shall try to write to you promptly.

Yours sincerely,

Roger Smith  
Assistant to Baroness Butler-Sloss