THE IRAQ INQUIRY

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR OF THE IRAQ INQUIRY

In the light of recent comment and speculation I am making the following statement on behalf of the Iraq Inquiry.

I should like firstly to reiterate that my colleagues and I understand the anguish of the families of those who lost their lives in the conflict. We take the responsibility we were given as an independent Inquiry extremely seriously, and understand the need for Government, Parliament and the public to see our report as soon as possible.

The Inquiry was tasked by Mr Gordon Brown, as Prime Minister, with drawing lessons from the UK's involvement in the Iraq conflict between 2001 and 2009. In its scope and length, this is an Inquiry mandate for which there is no precedent.

We have been guided throughout by a number of key principles:

- The Inquiry is independent and impartial. With the agreement of Parliament, we were asked to conduct our work within the established tradition of independent Inquiries and to determine our own procedure.

- We wished the process to be as open as possible. At our insistence, the large majority of the hearings were held in public, with witnesses speaking for themselves and not through lawyers.

- In the interests of openness, we agreed that the Government should give us access to all relevant documents; and have made a large number of requests for declassification of documents, including Prime Ministerial Notes and telephone calls with the US President. This has taken a considerable time. Some documents have been received only this year. The declassification process continues. We intend to publish a large number of documents with our report.

- We intend the report to be rigorous, accurate, and firmly based on the evidence we have assembled.

- It is critically important that the report should be fair to all who participated in the conflict and to those who bore the responsibility of taking decisions.

Since the autumn of 2009 the Inquiry has held more than 130 sessions of witness evidence and received more than 150,000 documents. Given the scale of the task of assembling a reliable account of a nine-year period and drawing conclusions on a wide range of issues, it became apparent as the work proceeded that the report would have to be very long and would take a considerable time to produce. I

reflected that in my published letters to the Prime Minister and in the evidence I gave to the Foreign Affairs Committee in February 2015.

We have for some time been engaged in the 'Maxwellisation' process, in which individuals are given the opportunity to respond to provisional criticism of themselves in the Inquiry's draft report.

Some have questioned why Maxwellisation is happening at all. We consider it an essential part of the Inquiry's procedures, in order to ensure that conclusions drawn by the Inquiry are robust and that any criticism included in the final report is soundly based, fair and reasonable.

Maxwellisation is a confidential process - both the Inquiry and the individuals involved have made a commitment to that effect, which we still consider to be an essential part of ensuring fairness to individuals and intend to maintain.

Importantly, when witnesses agreed to give evidence to the Inquiry, they did so on the basis of the Inquiry's Witness Protocol, which says that:

> "If the Inquiry expects to criticise an individual in the final report, that individual will, in accordance with normal practice, be provided with relevant sections of the draft report in order to make any representations on the proposed criticism prior to publication of the final report." (Paragraph 30, available at www.iraqinquiry.org.uk)

Individuals have not been given an open-ended timescale and Maxwellisation is not a process of negotiation. The Inquiry has remained in control of its deadlines throughout the process. In some cases, the response sent to us required detailed and complex analysis which has taken time.

The Maxwellisation process is essential not only to the fairness but also the accuracy and completeness of our report. It has already led, for example, to the identification of government documents which had not been submitted to the Inquiry and which have in some cases opened up new issues.

We expect to receive the last responses to our Maxwellisation letters shortly. That will allow us to complete our consideration of the responses, to decide what further work will be needed, and to provide the Prime Minister and thus Parliament and the public with a timetable for the publication of our work.

Lastly, as has been reported, we have received a letter from lawyers acting for a group of families. I can confirm that, after careful thought, we have responded to the points they raised. I don't intend to comment on the substance of that response and such letters are not normally published.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT

26 AUGUST 2015