

On behalf of: The Secretary of
State for Foreign,
Commonwealth and
Development Affairs
By: Sir Philip Robert Barton
KCMG OBE
Exhibit: PRB1
No:1

Date: 18/05/23

IN THE MATTER OF:

THE UNITED KINGDOM
COVID-19 INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF SIR PHILIP ROBERT BARTON KCMG OBE ON BEHALF OF
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND
DEVELOPMENT AFFAIRS

I, **SIR PHILIP ROBERT BARTON KCMG OBE**, Permanent Under-Secretary of State ("**PUS**") at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ("**FCDO**"), King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AH, **WILL SAY** as follows:

Section 1: Introduction

1. I make this supplementary statement under Module 1 of the Inquiry on behalf of the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs ("**Secretary of State**") for the United Kingdom ("**UK**") Covid-19 Inquiry ("**Inquiry**").
2. I submit this statement in response to the List of Issues for Module 1 circulated by the Inquiry on 17 April 2023 ("**the List of Issues**"). This statement is supplementary to Tom Drew's statement of 16 February 2023 in respect of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office ("**FCO**") ("**the FCO statement**") and Nick Dyer's statement of 27

February 2023 in respect of the Department for International Development (“DFID”)(“the DFID statement”), both in response to the Module 1 Rule 9 Request issued to the FCDO on 24 November 2022 (“the Rule 9 Request”).

3. Upon reviewing the List of Issues, the FCDO has identified only one topic on which it is able to provide additional input: “*The basic characteristics and epidemiology of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARs CoV-2) and Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*”. This statement addresses that topic. The Rule 9 Request requested that responses focus on the period from 11 June 2009 to 21 January 2020. Nevertheless, in order to address this topic, this statement covers the period from January to March 2020.
4. I am duly authorised by the Secretary of State to make this statement on his behalf.
5. The contents of this statement are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. Many of the matters referred to are not within my personal knowledge, so I have drawn on the recollections of those officials who were working on the matters relevant to this statement.
6. There are now produced and shown to me 7 documents that have been exhibited to this statement, marked (PRB1/1 to 7- INQxxx) with the INQ number referring to the reference on the Inquiry’s disclosure system. All references to documents in this statement are to Exhibits as marked per the above unless otherwise stated. This statement has been prepared with the assistance of officials in the FCDO, including the FCDO’s Covid-19 Inquiry Unit.
7. My statement is structured as follows:

Section 1: Introduction.....	1
Section 2: Preliminary points	3
Section 3: Explanation of terminology.....	3
Section 4: My background.....	4
Section 5: The role, function and responsibilities of the FCO and DFID on 1 January 2020	4
Section 6: Governance and decision making in the FCO and DFID on 1 January 2020	4
Section 7: The basic characteristics and epidemiology of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARs CoV-2) and Coronavirus disease (COVID-19).....	4

Section 2: Preliminary points

8. At the outset of my statement, I wish to note, on behalf of the Secretary of State, the following preliminary points.
 - 8.1 First, the Secretary of State welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Inquiry. The Secretary of State supports the Inquiry in fulfilling its terms of reference.
 - 8.2 Second, reflecting the Secretary of State's goal of supporting the Inquiry in its work, the FCDO has gone to considerable effort to locate information and documents which respond to the Inquiry's requests. Notwithstanding the information provided with this statement (and provided to date preceding this statement), the Secretary of State remains ready to assist the Inquiry further through the provision of additional information and documents.

Section 3: Explanation of terminology

9. On 16 June 2020, the Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, the then Prime Minister, announced that DFID and FCO would merge to form a new department, what is now the FCDO. The FCDO came into existence on 2 September 2020.¹
10. The FCO and DFID are now sometimes referred to, particularly in FCDO internal documents, as "legacy departments" and, in internal and external documents as "ex-FCO" and "ex-DFID". These terms all describe the departments which merged to become the FCDO.
11. To be consistent with the names used by these departments before 2 September 2020, this statement will use the term "FCO" to refer to activities undertaken by, and material originating from, the former Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the term "DFID" to refer to activities undertaken by, and material originating from, the former Department for International Development. The term "FCDO" will be used to refer to activities undertaken by, and material originating from, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office since its establishment on 2 September 2020.

¹ See the Transfer of Functions (Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs) Order 2020 (SI 2020/942) made as an Order in Council pursuant to sections 1 and 2 of the Ministers of the Crown Act 1975.

Section 4: My background

12. I have been the PUS at the FCDO since 2 September 2020. As PUS, I am a Senior Civil Servant and the principal Civil Service adviser to the Secretary of State, and his / her Ministerial team.
13. As PUS, I am also responsible for the day-to-day management of the FCDO and I serve as its Accounting Officer. Additionally, in my role as PUS, I am head of HM Diplomatic Service.
14. I joined the FCO in 1986 and have worked in the Civil Service since then. During my time as a civil servant, I have worked in a number of roles in the FCO and FCDO, both in the UK and overseas, including as British High Commissioner to India, British High Commissioner to Pakistan and Deputy Head of Mission in the United States of America. I have also worked in the Cabinet Office and No. 10 Downing Street ("No. 10").

Section 5: The role, function and responsibilities of the FCO and DFID on 1 January 2020

15. The role, function and responsibilities of the FCO and DFID on 1 January 2020 are outlined in the FCO statement and the DFID statement.

Section 6: Governance and decision making in the FCO and DFID on 1 January 2020

16. Governance arrangements in the FCO and DFID are similarly set out in the FCO statement and the DFID statement.

Section 7: The basic characteristics and epidemiology of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARs CoV-2) and Coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

17. While the Department for Health and Social Care ("DHSC") and Public Health England ("PHE") were the lead HM Government department and non-executive agency respectively, the FCO and DFID's efforts in tracking the risk posed by the international spread of the Covid-19 virus, from 1 January 2020 to the announcement of the first UK lockdown at the end of March 2020, can be described, in broad terms, in two parts:

- 17.1 First, the FCO's overseas network provided information to the FCO in London, and through the FCO to HM Government more generally, on the spread of Covid-19 abroad. Two key ways in which this information was disseminated were in the

form of Diplomatic Telegrams (“DipTels”), and situation reports (“sitreps”) provided by Posts to the Coronavirus Taskforce (an explanation of the FCO’s overseas network and the use of DipTels is included in the FCO statement);

17.2 Second and additionally, both the FCO and DFID gathered data from open sources (that is, publicly available information drawn from the internet and elsewhere) and from and through liaison with international organisations such as the WHO on the spread of Covid-19 globally. This information and data complemented the data and information DHSC and others were also sourcing directly, including from the WHO.

18. In both respects, this information and data was used by the FCO and DFID to inform its own internal decision making, and was also provided to other HM Government departments, including No. 10 and the Cabinet Office, to assist with HM Government’s wider decision making on the UK’s response to the pandemic.

Reporting on the emergence and spread of Covid-19 in China

19. From mid-January 2020 the FCO in London began to receive reports on the spread of Covid-19 from its overseas network, largely in the form of DipTels. On 15 January 2020, the FCO’s Asia Pacific Directorate (which had responsibility within the FCO for China) first informed FCO Ministers, by way of an update paragraph to Minister Wheeler, of the emergence and increasing number of cases of a novel coronavirus (i.e. Covid-19) in Wuhan, China (PRB1/1- INQ000089103). Such an update paragraph was a standard means of making Ministers aware of an issue, particularly on a new or emerging subject, or one where there was not yet much information.

20. The first DipTels from the FCO’s Posts reporting the emergence and spread of Covid-19 came from the British Embassy in Beijing. On 20 January 2020, the British Embassy in Beijing sent a DipTel to the FCO reporting that a new strain of virus had originated in Wuhan. The DipTel reported that the virus was spreading and provided information about how the Chinese authorities were responding (PRB1/2- INQ000064685).

21. Further DipTels from the British Embassy in Beijing provided updates on the spread of the virus in China and the steps the Chinese government was taking in response over the following weeks (PRB1/3- INQ000064689 and PRB1/4- INQ000064693).

Reporting on the emergence and spread of Covid-19 beyond China

22. As cases of Covid-19 spread beyond China to other parts of Asia, the FCO’s overseas

network issued DipTels reporting on case numbers and overseas governments' responses to the emergence and spread of the virus. For example, on 3 February 2020 the British Embassy in Hanoi issued a DipTel reporting the first eight cases of Covid-19 in Vietnam (PRB1/5- INQ000100844) and on 7 February 2020 the British Embassy in Manila, Philippines, issued a DipTel reporting the first recorded fatality with Covid-19 outside China (PRB1/6- INQ000100845).

DFID Science Cell

23. In March 2020, a new DFID Science Cell ("**Science Cell**") was created within the Research and Evidence Directorate, to support DFID's response to Covid-19, and establish a regular pattern of briefing. This included weekly science updates to Directors, shared across DFID staff working on the response, HM Government departments and the Devolved Administrations. The Science Cell also provided weekly updates to the DFID Secretary of State.
24. In addition, the Science Cell developed and supported a range of other products, disseminated regularly to stakeholders, both in DFID and across HM Government. These included a daily dashboard, weekly science and epidemiology reports and weekly Covid-19 updates. An example of one of these products (dated 26 March 2020) is at (PRB1/7- INQ000100883).

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Dated **18th May 2023**

Personal Data

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