

Witness Name: Rt Hon Dame Priti Patel MP

Statement No.: Second

Exhibits: PP/01 – PP/26

Dated: 18 February 2025

## UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

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### SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF RT HON DAME PRITI PATEL MP DBE

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#### PART ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1. I, **Priti Patel**, provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 18 November 2024 (“the **Rule 9 Request**”).
2. I was Secretary of State for the Home Department (“**Home Secretary**”) from 24 July 2019 until 6 September 2022. I have been the Member of Parliament for Witham since 2010, and prior to being appointed as Home Secretary held the following positions:
  - July 2016 to November 2017: Secretary of State for International Development
  - May 2015 to July 2016: Minister of State for Employment
  - July 2014 to May 2015: Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury
3. This statement is based on my personal recollections of the actions and decisions taken by myself, in my capacity as a Member of Parliament, during the Covid-19 Pandemic (“the Pandemic”). I have been assisted in preparing this statement by my Senior Parliamentary Assistant and, as appropriate, by the dedicated Home Office team formed to support the Covid-19 Inquiry. My Senior Parliamentary Assistant and the Home Office team can search records to support my recollections and provide factual information about government and parliamentary policies and practices.

4. To assist the Inquiry, I have provided all correspondence and enquiries made in relation to the individuals and companies listed in the Rule 9 received by me and my parliamentary office. The Home Office has separately searched its corporate repositories and informed me that it has no record of correspondence relating to the specified individuals and companies, except for the email with my Special Advisors exhibited in paragraph 29.
5. Before progressing to the detail of my statement, I wish to express my sincere condolences to all who were bereaved during the Pandemic. Every death was a tragedy and my thoughts go to all of those who lost loved ones or continue to suffer from the impacts of Covid-19. I also wish to pay tribute to all those who worked to deliver vital equipment and supplies to frontline workers, including the many individuals in my constituency who gave their time and services to help others.

#### **Statement Structure**

6. This statement is structured to answer the specific questions in the Rule 9 as follows:
  - i. **Part Two** summarises the handling of correspondence and enquiries by a Member of Parliament's office, and the impact of Covid-19, to provide context to the Inquiry's request for information.
  - ii. **Part Three** outlines my relationships before, during, and after the Pandemic with:
    - (a) Samir Jassal and Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd
    - (b) Surbjit Shergill and Dymon Cap Ltd
    - (c) Kiran Jassal and Sunbeam Consulting Ltd.
  - iii. **Part Four** addresses the Inquiry's questions on lobbying, contracts, and donations.
  - iv. **Part Five** outlines my role in the award of contracts, and my understanding of the roles of the Right Honourable Matt Hancock and Minira Murza in the award of the contracts to Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd.

#### **Statement Summary**

7. **I had no role or decision-making responsibility in the award of contracts for personal protective equipment (PPE) during the Pandemic.**
8. **MPs from across the House of Commons were approached by individuals and businesses offering their services to support the vital effort to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.** These approaches were made following the Government's 'call to arms'

for the goods and services, including technologies, ventilators, and PPE, required to help save lives.

9. **As a constituency MP, I received a high volume of correspondence relating to the impact of the Pandemic, including offers of goods and services.** My parliamentary office forwarded these offers, as appropriate, to the relevant Government departments in line with standard processes for handling correspondence. Correspondence sent to the Home Office was similarly forwarded, as appropriate, by my officials.
10. **I did not advocate for the award of contracts to any supplier, including Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd.** The forwarding of correspondence to relevant departments so that they could appropriately consider and respond does not constitute advocating for companies to secure contracts.
11. **I had no knowledge of the financial or commercial arrangements between Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd and Dymon Cap Ltd, or between Dymon Cap Ltd, Samir Jassal, and Surbjit Shergill.** Donations to my 2024 leadership campaign by a company owned by Kiran Jassal were declared in accordance with the relevant rules.
12. **The insinuations of impropriety directed at me, as reported in the media, in relation to the matters and individuals outlined in this statement are, in my view, politically motivated.** Inaccurate and misleading claims based on correspondence and legal proceedings have been subject to further comment in the media. These claims are unfounded.

## **PART TWO: OVERVIEW OF MP CORRESPONDENCE PROCESS**

13. I consider that one of my key duties as an MP is to assist the public, and I receive a high daily volume of correspondence from across the country requesting i) support or information, or ii) relating to matters which I champion or campaign on. To assist constituents and members of the public who contact me, I often need to forward correspondence onto a range of third parties such as: local authorities, Government departments or agencies, NHS trusts and healthcare providers, and private companies and organisations.

14. I am supported in my duties by my parliamentary office team. The team consists of three to five people who are trained to handle casework, correspondence, and enquiries. All letters, e-mails, and telephone enquiries are treated in broadly the same way, and my office and I will pass on information to a relevant third party regardless of our opinion on an issue. I consider that our role is to be a conduit for passing information to those organisations or individuals best placed to respond to my constituents.
15. My office and I conduct as much activity as is possible in writing to maintain accurate records, enable a shared awareness of cases, and ensure transparency and accountability. The processes my office follows for the handling of casework and enquiries are not unique and I understand that other Members of Parliament triage, assess, and handle casework, enquiries, and correspondence in a similar manner.
16. During the Pandemic, like all MPs and their respective offices, my parliamentary office faced a surge in the volume of correspondence and enquiries from people, businesses, and organisations from across the country directly affected by Covid-19. These cases included businesses impacted by restrictions and lockdown seeking support, households with disabled residents concerned about the care they could receive, parents concerned about education for their children, couples having their wedding plans disrupted, local charities concerned about the impact on their operations, and people worried about their jobs and livelihoods. I also received correspondence from the public in relation to Government announcements, statements I made, and comments I gave during the media press conferences I presented on behalf of the Government. Given the high volume of correspondence coming into my office, my team were processing cases as quickly as possible.
17. My office also received a high volume of enquiries from people and businesses offering assistance to support the Government, NHS, and local authorities. Upon receiving such offers of help or enquiries about working with the Government, these were triaged in the usual manner by my office and representations made accordingly to the relevant and appropriate third parties. The specific correspondence relating to the provision of the PPE by Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd, which is the subject of this statement, was handled in the same manner by which all other correspondence was handled by my parliamentary office.

## **PART THREE: RELATIONSHIPS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC**

### **Samir Jassal and Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd**

18. I have known Samir Jassal for approximately ten years through his involvement with the Conservative and Unionist Party. He is a party member, locally elected councillor, parliamentary candidate, supporter, and donor. Mr Jassal has also previously supported the diaspora engagement work I have been engaged with. During the Pandemic, he contacted me in relation to the provision of i) KN95 face masks, and ii) Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs).

#### *KN95 Face Mask*

19. In the early weeks of the pandemic, there was a widely reported shortage of PPE as well as concerns over the types of PPE that were effective to provide protection from Covid-19. This led to widespread reporting in the media and concerns being raised by Members of Parliament about the provision of PPE and offers of help coming forward. I note that the Inquiry will be considering these matters in respect of PPE. However, it does appear to me that there was not an effective process in place to consider all of the PPE needs of the UK. The challenges of sourcing and securing the delivery of PPE were acknowledged by the Government: for example, the Health Secretary commented on this on 23 March 2020, stating, "There have been challenges and I can see that. We're on it and trying to solve all the problems."<sup>1</sup>

20. As a result of the challenges being experienced, in April 2020 the Government established a UK-wide plan, which included referencing a call to arms for businesses and organisations able to supply PPE to some forward. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care stated: "There is a herculean effort behind the scenes, supported by the military, to get the right kit to our frontline heroes. These new supply chains, matched with a call to arms for more businesses and organisations to join this national effort, will help save lives."<sup>2</sup>

21. Following the UK Government's plan for a national effort on PPE and the 'call to arms' in April 2020, Mr Jassal contacted my parliamentary email on 1 May 2020 regarding

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<sup>1</sup> PP/01 - INQ000561709

<sup>2</sup> PP/02 - INQ000561710

PPE.<sup>3</sup> This email and subsequent correspondence are listed below in chronological order and includes the information regarding the PPE he was involved with, which my office was then able to make enquiries about:

- i. **1 May 2020:** Contact from Samir Jassal regarding a company he had put forward for PPE (masks).<sup>4</sup>
- ii. **1 May 2020:** Parliamentary office responds to Samir Jassal requesting more information.<sup>5</sup>
- iii. **1 May 2020:** Surbjit Shergill emails to provide more information, with details on the KN95 face masks order he said his company had been progressing which had since been cancelled. His email signature indicates that Surbjit Shergill is Head of Sales at Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd.<sup>6</sup>
- iv. **3 May 2020:** Parliamentary office responds to Surbjit Shergill and sends ministerial correspondence enclosing Mr Shergill's email to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster asking for the matter to be reviewed, for direct contact to be made with the company, for any contractual obligations owed by the government to be ascertained and for the government to work with the company to distribute and supply the masks.<sup>7</sup>
- v. **5 May 2020:** Parliamentary office follows up with Cabinet Office.<sup>8</sup>
- vi. **13 May 2020:** The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) replies to my Parliamentary office in the form of a letter from Matt Hancock to me. This letter responded to my letter, dated 3 May 2020, to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. This reply is forwarded to Surbjit Shergill with a cover letter by my office.<sup>9</sup>
- vii. **14 May 2020:** Surbjit Shergill provides a response to letter, where he references a further type of mask that they have available. Parliamentary office replies to Surbjit Shergill confirming that his email has been drawn to the attention of the Department for Transport and Cabinet Office, and letters enclosing Mr Shergill's response are sent by my office to Department for Transport and Cabinet Office on 15 May 2020.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> PP/02 - INQ000561710

<sup>4</sup> PP/03 - INQ000561680 ; PP/04 - INQ000561681

<sup>5</sup> PP/04 - INQ000561681

<sup>6</sup> PP/05 - INQ000561704 ; page 1-2

<sup>7</sup> PP/06 - INQ000561706 ; PP/07 - INQ000561699

<sup>8</sup> PP/05 - INQ000561704 ; page 3; PP/07 - INQ000561699 ; PP/08 - INQ000561682 ; PP/09 - INQ000561683

<sup>9</sup> PP/10 - INQ000561697 ; PP/05 - INQ000561704 ; page 4

<sup>10</sup> PP/05 - INQ000561704 ; page 4-7; PP/11 - INQ000561707 ; PP/12 - INQ000561705

22. After 14 May 2020, my parliamentary office and I have no record of further contact with Mr Jassal regarding the provision of KN95 face masks. The information provided to my office from Mr Shergill related predominantly to KN95 face masks. Mr Shergill did make a further reference in the correspondence to my office on 14 May 2020 to a “Type IIR fluid resistant mask” and this was passed by my office on to the Cabinet Office who were leading on procurement and to the Department for Transport (as per Mr Shergill’s request to share the information with the Department for Transport).<sup>11</sup>
23. I hold no further records of any contact on these matters after the letters drafted by my office on 14 May 2020 and sent by email on 15 May 2020.

*Lateral Flow Tests*

24. On 18 January 2021, Samir Jassal made a new enquiry on behalf of Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd in relation to the provision of LFTs.<sup>12</sup> My parliamentary office forwarded the email, with a covering letter, to DHSC, and responded to Mr Jassal to inform him that the matter had been raised.<sup>13</sup> Mr Jassal sent a follow up email on 22 January to enquire if any response had been received. I have no record of receiving a response from the DHSC.<sup>14</sup>
25. Mr Jassal sent a further email to me and my parliamentary office’s email addresses regarding LFTs, on behalf of Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd, on 22 March 2021.<sup>15</sup> My office holds no records of any further action being taken or correspondence being received on this matter. Moreover, neither my office nor myself hold any records of any further involvement with Mr Jassal or Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd on the provision of LFTs.
26. I had no contact with Mr Jassal from 22 March 2021 until the 2024 General Election.

*Knowledge of Dymon Cap Ltd, Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd, and Surbjit Shergill*

27. Before 1 January 2020, I had no personal knowledge of Dymon Cap Ltd, Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd, or Surbjit Shergill.

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<sup>11</sup> PP/05 - INQ000561704, page 4-5

<sup>12</sup> PP/13 - INQ000561712, page 1-2

<sup>13</sup> PP/13 - INQ000561712, page 2-3; PP/14 - INQ000561690; PP/15 - INQ000561713

<sup>14</sup> PP/13 - INQ000561712

<sup>15</sup> PP/16 - INQ000561684; PP/17 - INQ000561685; PP/18 - INQ000561686; PP/19 - INQ000561687

28. During the Pandemic, my office and I had contact only with Samir Jassal and Surbjit Shergill, on behalf of Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd, in relation to the KN95 masks and LFTs as outlined in paragraphs 21-25. My office and I have no record of contact with Dymon Cap Ltd and I was not aware at the time of the correspondence outlined in those paragraphs that it provided its services to Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd.
29. My office and I had no knowledge that Dymon Cap Ltd was owned by Surbjit Shergill, or that Mr Jassal supplied his services through the company. Consequently, my office and I had no knowledge at the time of the correspondence outlined in paragraphs 21-25 of Mr Jassal's reported remuneration from Dymon Cap Ltd for providing his services.
30. Neither my office or I have any records or recollections of having had contact with Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd or Surbjit Shergill since the correspondence regarding LFTs in January to March 2021.
31. My office and I were not aware of the specific PPE contracts awarded to Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd until my office received media enquiries and correspondence from DHSC on legal proceedings and disclosures taking place in 2021, as outlined below.
32. I became aware of the connection between Dymon Cap Ltd and Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd by virtue of the questions set out in the Rule 9 request received by the inquiry in November 2024.

*Media Enquiries and Pre Action Protocol Letter*

33. My Parliamentary office received the below media queries and correspondence in relation to contracts awarded to Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd during the Pandemic:
  - i. **12 April 2021:** BBC enquiry on PPE contract and Samir Jassal.<sup>16</sup>
  - ii. **20 April 2021:** DHSC contact on the release of correspondence from me to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster dated 3 May 2020 on KN95 face masks, following a Pre-Action Protocol letter from the Good Law Project to DHSC.<sup>17</sup> On 21 April 2021 my parliamentary office inform me (having discussed with DHSC) that

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<sup>16</sup> PP/20 - INQ000561688; PP/21 - INQ000561689  
<sup>17</sup> PP/22 - INQ000561691; PP/23 - INQ000561698

the reply from Matt Hancock to me dated 13 May 2020 will also be released as part of the response to the Pre-Action Protocol letter.

iii. **27 May 2021:** Contact between my parliamentary office and Home Office Special Advisors regarding media query on Samir Jassal.<sup>18</sup>

34. These queries provided further information about the contract awards and the financial and commercial arrangements between named individuals and Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd, which I was not aware of during my office's correspondence with the relevant individuals.

#### **Kiran Jassal and Sunbeam Consulting Ltd**

35. Before and during the Pandemic, I had no knowledge of Sunbeam Consulting Ltd. I only became aware of the company in relation to the donations received, and declared, in summer 2024 in support of my campaign for the leadership of the Conservative and Unionist Party.

36. I know that Samir Jassal is married to Kiran Jassal, but I cannot recall when I became aware of their marriage. I had no direct contact with Kiran Jassal. I learned that Kiran Jassal was the owner of Sunbeam Consulting Ltd in July 2024 when the offer of donations for my leadership campaign was made.

37. I have no knowledge of the relationships between Samir Jassal, Dymon Cap Ltd, and Surbjit Shergill, and Kiran Jassal and Sunbeam Consulting Ltd before, during, or after the Pandemic, beyond what I have set out above.

#### **PART FOUR: LOBBYING, CONTRACTS, AND DONATIONS**

38. Samir Jassal's relationship with the Conservative and Unionist Party is summarised in paragraph 18.

39. I was first aware that Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd were awarded contracts for PPE to the value of around £131m in April and May 2021 through media queries and correspondence with DHSC on the related Pre-Action Protocol letter, as outlined in paragraph 31. I was not aware of the full details of those contracts which were awarded, but my office did locate details of two contracts published online through the Contracts Finder webpages after receipt of the media queries and DHSC correspondence. These

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<sup>18</sup> PP/24 - INQ000561702

were a contract awarded for IIR masks to the value of £28.8m and a contract for FFP3 respirator masks to the value of £102.6m.<sup>19</sup> From what my office could gather, these contracts had no direct relation to the KN95 face masks enquiries which we made in May 2020 and no direct relation to the enquiries which we made in January 2021 in relation to LFTs.

40. The emails from my Senior Parliamentary Assistant office dated 20 and 21 April 2021 briefed me on the FFP3 contract and the email from Senior Parliamentary Assistant to my Special Advisors at the Home Office on 27 May 2021 briefed on the IIR masks contract. This email of 27 May 2021 mentions the reference in the correspondence my office sent to the Cabinet Office and Department for Transport dated 14 May 2020 (see para 19) on IIR products Mr Shergill stated he had available, but my office could not ascertain any direct link between this correspondence and the DHSC contract awarded for IIR for £28.8m. As well as providing details of the contracts and of the enquiries from the media and the DHSC on the Pre Action Protocol letter, my office also provided a view on potential responses to further enquiries or inaccurate insinuations that may be made.
41. I had no knowledge before November 2024 that Dymon Cap Ltd was paid £16.37m by Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd in relation to services provided in the award of contracts. I was made aware of it through the information provided in the Rule 9 Request from the Covid-19 Inquiry in November 2024.
42. In relation to the donations I received from Sunbeam Consulting Ltd, they were provided to me in respect of my campaign for the leadership of the Conservative and Unionist Party. On 29 July 2024 I was provided with a cash donation of £10,000. This was followed by a donation of a benefit in kind with the use of a car and driver provided for me to support my travel during the campaign, covering the period 1 August 2024 to 8 September 2024. Two declarations, each for a value of £10,700, were made in respect of that benefit in kind. The donations were declared in accordance with the relevant rules. I am not aware of there being any connection between the matters outlined in paragraph 35 and 36 and these donations to my leadership campaign.

## **PART FIVE: ROLES IN AWARDING CONTRACTS**

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<sup>19</sup> PP/25 - INQ000561708; PP/26 - INQ000561711

43. In my capacity as Home Secretary or as a Member of Parliament, I was not involved in the awarding of any contract for PPE. Consequently, I had no role in the decision to award contracts to Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd. My role in the award of the contracts to Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd by HMG was limited to forwarding and following up on correspondence, as detailed in paragraphs 13 - 18.
44. I have no knowledge of the roles of Right Honourable Matt Hancock and Munira Murza in awarding contracts to Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd. I had no contact with Munira Murza regarding Pharmaceuticals Direct Ltd, and my only contact with Mr Hancock was in relation to the enquiries on KN95 face masks and LFTs made in May 2020 and in January 2021, as outlined above.
45. My office did not conduct due diligence or research, or request further information, on the services being offered by Mr Jassal and Mr Shergill. This is because my office acted as a conduit to pass on offers of assistance to the relevant government departments, as outlined in paragraphs 13-18, and in response to the Government's 'call to arms'. My Parliamentary Office does not have any responsibility to vet or conduct due diligence on enquiries received, as those would have been a matter for the decision-makers involved in procurement. At a time of national and international crisis, my office prioritised taking action to forward enquiries on to the appropriate relevant third parties to consider and respond to. Additionally, my office did not have the capacity to conduct any checks, and neither my team nor I had responsibilities for awarding contracts. It was the responsibility of DHSC and the Cabinet Office to conduct due diligence as part of the procurement process.

### **STATEMENT OF TRUTH**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings 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 of its truth.

Signed:  Personal Data

**Name:** Rt Hon Dame Priti Patel DBE MP

**Dated:** 18 February 2025