

The Rt Hon The Lord Lloyd of Berwick

Opening Public Statement – 6th July 2004

Gulf War Illnesses – Independent Public Inquiry

In opening this Public Inquiry I want to start with a tribute to Lord Morris of Manchester, since it was Lord Morris who asked me to Chair the Inquiry. He has had an extraordinary career in the service of disabled people since his first election to Parliament as member for Manchester, Wythenshawe in 1964, a seat which he held for 33 years. In 1970 he promoted, as a private member, the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act. In 1974 he became the first Minister for disabled people, a post which he held for 5 years. Thereafter, he continued his concern for disabled people from the opposition Front Bench in the House of Commons, and as a backbencher in the House of Lords. His record of service is quite outstanding.

In 1994 he was one of the founder members of the inter-Parliamentary Gulf War Group. The purpose of the group is to focus Parliamentary and public attention on the problems and needs of Gulf Veterans with war related illnesses, or the dependants of those who have died since the conflict.

Over 6,000 of those who served in the Gulf in 1991 suffered from some form of illness which they believe to be war-related. Almost all are in receipt of a war pension. In 1997 The Royal British Legion called for the

Government to set up a Public Inquiry to investigate the circumstances surrounding these illnesses, and their possible causes. The call has been repeated every year since 1997. But no such Inquiry has yet taken place. Lord Morris has pressed the Government on numerous occasions. But on each occasion he has been told that the time for an Inquiry is not yet ripe, although the possibility of an Inquiry has not been ruled out.

It is now 14 years since the first Gulf conflict, and 7 years since The Royal British Legion called for an Inquiry. In the United States a Presidential Commission was set up very soon after the end of the war. Lord Morris has played an important part in the work of that Commission, on both sides of the Atlantic.

It was in these circumstances that Lord Morris asked me to Chair the Inquiry which was announced on Monday, 14 June 2004. I shall be sitting with Dr Norman Jones, formerly Consulting Physician at St Thomas' Hospital and Treasurer of The Royal College of Physicians, and Sir Michael Davies, formerly Clerk of the Parliaments. It hardly needs saying that the Inquiry will be completely independent. There is no hidden agenda. Our terms of reference are to investigate the circumstances that have led to the ill health, and in some cases death, of over 6,000 British troops following deployment to the Gulf, and to Report.

We shall start, as is only right, by hearing evidence from a selection of the veterans, their dependants and their representatives: The Gulf Veterans Association and The National Gulf Veterans and Families Association. Sadly, we cannot hear them all. But we hope that as many veterans as possible who are suffering from what they believe to be war related illnesses or the survivors of those who have died, will give evidence in writing to Vijay Mehan, the Secretary for the Inquiry at Pattinson & Brewer, 30 Great James Street, London, WC1N 3HA, or they can submit evidence electronically and follow the proceedings of the Inquiry on the website at www.Lloyd-gwii.com The hearings will take place at 1 Abbey Gardens, Great College Street, London SW1P 3SE close to Westminster Abbey and will start at 10.30am on Monday, 12 July 2004.

After hearing from the veterans, we will listen to expert medical evidence on the possible causes of the various illnesses. It is too early to identify all the possible causes. But what can be said even now is this. Nobody has as yet suggested that there is a single underlying cause for all the illnesses, nor are all the illnesses identical. So although they are sometimes referred to collectively as “The Gulf War Syndrome” this may be an inaccurate, or at least insufficient, description. Nor is it now suggested that whatever may have gone wrong in 1991 the Government of the day did other than act with the best of intentions. Our purpose at this stage is to find the facts, not to attribute blame.

We shall also set aside time for hearing evidence and submissions of a more general nature. Here we hope to hear from the Government, and in particular from the Ministry of Defence. Indeed it is essential that we should do so. I have already written to the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Health to ask for their co-operation.

I now come back to our independence. The Inquiry is being funded by an independent charitable trust, which wishes to remain anonymous. Dr Norman Jones will receive his expenses and Sir Michael Davies, as Administrator, will receive his expenses, if any, and a modest honorarium. As a retired Law Lord, I do not wish to receive any remuneration or expenses myself.

Finally, I should say that I did my National Service in the Army in 1948 and have been a member of the Alfriston Branch of The Royal British Legion since 1994.

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