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D/Secretariat/TO/Simon/20091230

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Dear Mr Simon and Mr Steiger,

Thank you for your letter of the 5 November to the Prime Minister on the subject of the death of Sultan Munadi, and for the condolences you offer for the death of Corporal John Harrison. I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Prime Minister. I would first like to express my sadness at the tragic death of Mr Munadi, our thoughts are with his family, friends and colleagues.

I can assure you that the decision to mount a military hostage rescue operation is never taken lightly. In this case the rescue operation was undertaken on the grounds that it represented the best chance of ensuring the safe release of the hostages, both Sultan Munadi and Stephen Farrell.

While the loss of life in this operation is deeply regrettable, we still believe that the decision to mount a hostage rescue operation was the right one. There was a real risk that Mr Munadi and Mr Farrell would be killed by their captors, and any delay was likely to increase this risk. When an opportunity to act presented itself, we concluded that the risk to the lives of Mr Munadi and Mr Farrell would be greater if we failed to act. You will understand that where military rescue operations are concerned, the risk to both the hostages and the rescuers cannot be completely removed.

The Taleban in Afghanistan are fierce opponents and coalition operations often meet significant resistance. British Armed Forces act with the utmost courage and professionalism and in this instance, significant risk was taken to release the hostages from their Taleban captors. Mr Farrell's account of 10 September makes it clear that he confirmed that Mr Munadi had been killed. As in all operations, there must be an on-going assessment of risks, and although desirable, the operational circumstances may not allow for the recovery of a body.

For the reasons above, we have concluded that an inquiry is not warranted.