

Witness Name: Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt  
Statement No.: WITN3499033  
Exhibits: N/A  
Dated: 28/06/2022

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### SECOND WRITTEN STATEMENT OF THE RT HON JEREMY HUNT MP

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I provide this statement in response to notification under Rule 13 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 and following a request under Rule 9 of the 2006 Rules dated 16 May 2022.

I, Jeremy Hunt will say as follows: -

#### **Section 1: Introduction**

1. My name is Jeremy Hunt. I was Secretary of State for Health between 6 September 2012 and 9 July 2018. My date of birth is GRO-C 1966.

#### **Section 2: Responses to criticisms by W1210**

2. I am grateful to the Inquiry for giving me notice under Rule 13 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 of criticism contained in the written statement made by Mr Jason Jonathan Evans.
3. At paragraph 132 of his statement of 27 February 2020, Mr Evans stated that the responses of ministers and Prime Ministers did not address the issues raised in his correspondence, with the standard response being to divert from the difficult points being raised, deflect responsibility and generally obfuscate. He stated he found my responses, amongst others, to be particularly unhelpful and/or to have given 'a masterclass in smoke and mirrors'.

4. Further, at paragraph 130 of his statement, Mr Evans stated that he had drafted numerous letters to me and received replies from me about 'the factual background and disputed narrative of the scandal'. Mr Evans has not provided copies of the numerous letters he refers to. However, he has provided an exhibit of an "at the time" analysis of changes in Department of Health ('DH') responses and wording'. The exhibit [WITN1210032], includes a redacted letter from me, responding to an allegation that Nicola Blackwood misled Parliament during a Parliamentary debate on 24 November 2016. A further version of the same letter is then provided with highlighted differences in the text. The exhibit includes an analysis and response to my letters. The exhibit also includes a letter from Lord O'Shaughnessy, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, in the Lords, which addresses the same matters, as well as correspondence from Lord O'Shaughnessy to Tim Farron MP again about similar matters.
5. I do not have a recollection of Mr Evans' letters to me or the responses provided in my name. I must explain that letters from members of the public or organisations, written to the Secretary of State would be answered by officials, or by a junior minister, rather than me personally. Initially, I also followed a convention whereby letters sent to me as a constituency MP were replied to by other ministers. However, I subsequently changed this in favour of replying personally - but following departmental advice as to the contents of that reply. This was a change made out of a sense of courtesy, and to make responses more direct, rather than having any particular impact on the content of any replies.
6. The letters that were sent in my name would have reflected government policy and the position of DH in relation to the narrative of the events at that time. Having reviewed [WITN1210032], I note that the letters sent by me, as well as that sent by Lord O'Shaughnessy are very similar, which is not surprising. I recall that Lord O'Shaughnessy was, at that time, the Ministerial lead for NHS Blood and Transplant and the junior minister responsible for blood issues. As such, his responsibilities included responding to correspondence about issues related to blood and blood products, which would have included responding on my behalf when MPs wrote to me, as Secretary of State.
7. I do not think that Lord O'Shaughnessy, or the officials responding to letters on my behalf would have sought to deceive or mislead. They were, however, obliged to follow collective responsibility and present the position of the government as a whole which

at times differed from what I or Lord O'Shaughnessy will have believed personally. I am sorry that Mr Evans found these responses to be unhelpful.

8. I do hold the view that a public inquiry into these events was justified and that it would have been better if it could have taken place sooner. I can see that the letters analysed by Mr Evans were sent in late 2016 or early 2017, by which time I had long held the view that only a public inquiry would meet the need to investigate, in detail, the serious concerns held by campaigners and the gulf between their views and the justification of government actions in the 1970s and 1980s that was set out in these letters. However, as I have explained in my Rule 9 statement to the Inquiry, the situation reflected a dialogue of the deaf, whereby calls for a public inquiry were futile because of the firm position held by the Treasury that there were no funds available to meet the likely recommendations of a public inquiry, at that time; and whereby answers which defended the actions previously taken could never satisfy campaigners, for reasons I fully understand. In rejecting calls for a public inquiry prior to July 2017, because of the principle of collective responsibility I had to follow the line of the government of the day, which I was not in a position to publicly challenge, and which differed from my personal belief that an inquiry was warranted.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed:

**GRO-C**

Dated

28/06/22