

Witness Name: Robin Butler  
Statement No.: WITN4131001  
Exhibits: WITN4131002  
Dated: May 2020

## INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

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### WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ROBIN BUTLER

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 04 March 2020.

I, Robin Butler, Baron Butler of Brockwell will say as follows: -

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

1. My name is Frederick Edward Robin Butler. My date of birth is GRO-C 1938. My address is C/O The Government Legal Department, 102 Petty France, Westminster, London SW1H 9GL.
2. I studied at Harrow School before joining University College, Oxford, where I gained a double first in literae humaniores. I joined the Civil Service in 1961 working in Her Majesty's Treasury ("HMT"). I have held various posts during my service as set out below:

1961-1963	HMT
1964-1965	Private Secretary to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury
1965-1969	Secretary to the Budget Committee
1969	Seconded to the Bank of England
1970-1972	Central Policy Review Staff in Cabinet Office
1972-1974	Private Secretary to Edward Heath Prime Minister
1974-1975	Private Secretary to Harold Wilson Prime Minister
1975-1977	Assistant Secretary, General Expenditure Intelligence Division

1977-1980	Under-Secretary, General Expenditure Intelligence Division
1980-1982	Principal Establishment Officer, HMT
1982-1985	Principal Private Secretary to Margaret Thatcher Prime Minister
1985-1987	Second Permanent Secretary, Public Expenditure at HMT
1988-1998	Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service
1998-2008	Master of University College, Oxford
1998-present	Member of the House of Lords

3. It may assist the Inquiry to understand that whilst I was Cabinet Secretary, many papers passing between Government Departments would have been copied to me in my role, but that does not mean that I played an active part in the subject matter being discussed within those documents or that I had more than mere knowledge of the existence of a particular subject matter.

## **Section 2: Experience as Private Secretary to Harold Wilson 1974-1975**

4. During my time as the Private Secretary to Prime Minister Harold Wilson I cannot recall any meetings or communications regarding attempts to achieve self-sufficiency in blood and blood products, nor the risks of using imported blood nor the risks of infection from blood. In the event that I may have forgotten such meetings, given the passage of time since that role, a search of papers has been conducted and I have not been provided with any documents to demonstrate that I was aware of those matters.

## **Section 3: Experience at the Treasury 1975-1982 and 1985-1987**

5. During my time at HMT between 1975 and 1982 I cannot recall any decisions regarding funding of the Blood Products Laboratory at Elstree or any other funding regarding attempts to achieve self-sufficiency in blood products, nor can I recall why self-sufficiency was not maintained. In the event that I may have forgotten such meetings, given the passage of time since that role, a search of papers has been conducted and I have not been provided with any documents to demonstrate that I was aware of those matters.
6. Similarly, when I was at HMT between 1985 and 1987 I have no recollection of the above matters, nor have I been shown any papers to demonstrate an awareness.

#### **Section 4: Experience as Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister 1982-1985**

7. I was Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, who was the late Margaret Thatcher between 1982 and 1985. During this role I cannot recall any meetings or communications regarding attempts to achieve self-sufficiency in blood and blood products, nor the risks of using imported blood nor the risks of infection from blood. In the event that I may have forgotten such meetings, given the passage of time since that role, a search of papers has been conducted and I have not been provided with any documents to demonstrate that I was aware of those matters.
8. During my time as Principal Private Secretary to Margaret Thatcher I cannot recall having any knowledge of a reaction in Government to the infection of haemophiliacs with AIDS and hepatitis via infected blood products and blood transfusions. A search of papers has been conducted and I have not been provided with any documents to demonstrate that I attended any meetings nor was I sighted on any internal communications relating to this subject matter.
9. As part of the preparation of this witness statement I have seen a document dated 25 September 1985 which touches upon self-sufficiency and mentions the Blood Products Laboratory at Elstree but I left Downing Street at the beginning of the summer recess to take up my post at HMT, so I was not the Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister when that letter was sent.

#### **Section 5: Experience as Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service 1988-1998**

10. Whilst I have no recollection of discussions regarding attempts to achieve self-sufficiency or the risk of using imported blood and blood products during my time as Cabinet Secretary, I was aware of the risk of infection from blood products insofar as I was involved in communications regarding making provisions for blood products to accompany Ministers on overseas business. Documents which I have reviewed for the purposes of this Inquiry reveal that in 1987 the Civil Service Occupational Health Service *"became aware that blood transfusions in the developing world were associated with an unacceptable risk of HIV infections and Hepatitis B"*.

11. A memo from Rex Davie, a security adviser in the Cabinet Office, to me, dated 20 February 1989 set out the proposed arrangements for blood supplies for the Prime Minister, other Ministers and staff when travelling to countries with poor blood supplies (**WITN4131002**). On 21 February 1989 I authorised the purchase of a special container which would transport the blood and mean that it was not wasted if it was not required on the trip.
12. My other knowledge of the risks of infection from blood products during this role was largely related to my position as Chairman of the Committee to monitor progress on research relating to transmissible spongiform encephalopathies ("TSEs") in 1997. The brief background to this committee is that it was set up to monitor the research relating to TSEs. In approximately 1986 bovine spongiform encephalopathy ("BSE") was discovered and following on from that, the variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease "(vCJD)", the human form of BSE was discovered.
13. I am aware that I was sighted of documents including a memo to the Prime Minister in late 1997 relating to blood and CJD. I note that the memo indicates there was to be a television programme concerning blood products and a risk of public confidence in blood transfusions diminishing, but this was in the context of CJD. Further documents were copied to me but these all related to blood in the context of CJD and the litigation that followed.
14. I cannot recall a Cabinet sub-committee meeting on 04 November 1987. The Government Legal Department and the Cabinet Office have conducted research on my behalf into this request and I understand that they cannot find any record of such a meeting on 04 November 1987. I have been told that a Home and Social Affairs Committee - Sub Committee on AIDS, met on 10 November 1987 and considered a memorandum dated 4 November 1987 regarding 'Special Financial Assistance for Haemophiliacs'. If that is the meeting the Inquiry's request relates to, I would not have been present because I was still at HMT at that time.
15. I cannot recall any reaction in Government or the Civil Service to the infection of haemophiliacs with AIDS and hepatitis via infected blood products and blood transfusions, nor can I recall attending any meetings.

## **Section 6: Destruction of Documents during my time as Cabinet Secretary**

16. I have no recollection of the details of document retention and destruction policies during my time as Cabinet Secretary. I am of course aware that such policies existed and were followed. I understand that lawyers acting for the Cabinet Office will assist the Inquiry with obtaining the relevant policies.

**Additional point**

17. I would like to add that I was aware of the issue of contaminated blood by virtue of it being in the press and being widely known, but I do not recall ever specifically attending meetings or working on matters directly relating to the contaminated blood issues which are the subject of this Inquiry. As mentioned above, I was involved with matters relating to contaminated blood in the context of the adoption of policy measures in relation to vCJD and also in respect of contingency arrangements relating to the provision of blood during overseas visits by senior members of the government.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed                     GRO-C                    

Dated 5 May 2020

**Table of exhibits:**

Date	Notes/ Description	Exhibit number
20.02.1989	Blood for Ministers visiting overseas	WITN4131002