

Witness Name: Sir Tony Blair

Statement No.: WITN7199001

Exhibits: WITN7199002

Dated: 31 August 2022

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF SIR TONY BLAIR

I, Sir Tony Blair, **WILL SAY** as follows: -

I am providing this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 20 July 2022.

Section 1 – introduction

1.1 My name is Sir Anthony Charles Lynton Blair KG but I am known as 'Tony'. My date of birth is GRO-C 1953. My address is C/O The Government Legal Department, 102 Petty France, Westminster, London SW1H 9GL.

1.2 Following finishing my school education I took a gap year before reading law at the University of Oxford and then I became a barrister. I joined the Labour Party in 1975 and won my first seat in 1983 in Sedgefield and became a Member of Parliament ("MP"). My career history from then is as follows:

1983-1987	MP
1988	A frontbench MP
1992	Shadow Home Secretary
1994-1997	Leader of the opposition
02 May 1997-27 June 2007	Prime Minister
2007-2015	Special Envoy to the Quartet on the Middle East

1.3 I am not and have not been a member of any committees, associations, parties, societies or groups relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

1.4 I have not provided evidence to, nor been involved in any other inquiries, investigations or criminal or civil litigation in relation to human immunodeficiency virus ("HIV") and/or hepatitis B virus ("HBV") and/or hepatitis C virus ("HCV") infections and/or variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease ("vCJD") in blood and/or blood products.

1.5 I hope that this statement assists Sir Brian Langstaff and his team with this inquiry into infected blood.

Section 2: Calls for a Public Inquiry

2.1 I decided, in line with other Prime Ministers, that it was not necessary to have a Public Inquiry into this issue. I am aware of the strength of the disagreement of those affected by this terrible tragedy with this view. At the outset I want to make clear that the refusal of an Inquiry does not in any way diminish my acceptance of the appalling nature of the tragedy, where people were infected by contaminated blood, suffered, in many cases died, through absolutely no fault of their own, with families and loved ones profoundly affected, and with the anguish of knowing that today such a thing would never and could never happen.

2.2 I believed with the information available to me at the time that the essential facts were known and that lessons had been learned. Were the Inquiry to find, with the benefit it has had of access to witnesses, paper records and the hindsight of the intervening years, that this was not the case, I would of course accept that finding.

2.3 When I first entered office as Prime Minister on 02 May 1997 I recall being aware of the issue of contaminated blood because it was a matter which had been in the public domain for a number of years. I do not recall exactly when I first became aware of the matter but I was, of course, aware that people had been infected with HIV, Hepatitis C and Hepatitis B from treatment provided by the NHS as it had been widely reported.

2.4 In terms of briefings, I do not recall receiving any particular briefings on this topic, though that is not to say that I did not receive any. As will be appreciated, as Prime Minister I would have to read a wealth of material on a daily basis on a variety of matters and given that I held office for 10 years, which ended 15 years ago, it is difficult to recall the precise details.

2.5 In preparing this statement Cabinet Office colleagues have conducted searches for relevant documents and I understand that they have been unable to locate any additional documents such as briefings or submissions directly related to contaminated blood and

the issues this inquiry is examining, which have not already been disclosed to the inquiry.

- 2.6 At Q6 I have been asked whether I was briefed about the meeting on 10th September 1997 when the Haemophilia Society met with the Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson, to discuss 'financial recompense' for haemophiliacs infected with Hepatitis C and other issues. I have had the benefit of reviewing documents **HSOC0014285**, **HSOC0014020** and **DHSC0041199_059**, but I was not invited to attend that meeting and cannot recall being briefed about it. It would not be routine for the PM to be briefed about meetings taking place between Secretaries of State and societies or groups.
- 2.7 I am also asked about any subsequent discussions I had with the Secretary of State for Health and any other involvement I may have had but I cannot recall any such discussions.
- 2.8 At Q7 I am asked about my recollection of the Haemophilia Society's 'Day of Action for Hepatitis C Victims' on 22nd July 1998, which included the presentation to Downing Street of a petition and 90 white lilies in memory of the deceased. I am familiar with the campaign, but cannot say whether it is a recollection of this particular day, or another day when lilies were presented at Downing Street.
- 2.9 I note that shortly after the presentation a letter was sent on my behalf to the Vice Chairman of the Haemophilia Society thanking him for the letter enclosing the petition **HSOC0024362**.
- 2.10 As to the impact the event had on decision making, I cannot say that the event had a direct effect on decision making because decisions made by government have to be based on numerous factors and emotional elements have to stand aside, in order to ensure that the best decisions are made based on the information available at the time and competing priorities must be balanced.
- 2.11 At Q8a-d I am asked a series of questions regarding the letter from Lord Alf Morris to me dated 11th May 1999 requesting a meeting with the Haemophilia Society to discuss a public inquiry and my reply dated 23 June 1999.
- 2.12 In the fourth paragraph of my reply I stated "*Infections with HIV and hepatitis C occurred, as you know, before advances in technology allowed blood products to be virally inactivated. These viral inactivation processes were introduced in 1985, as soon as it was possible to do so, and since then blood products have been treated effectively to destroy HIV and hepatitis C. Though I recognise that people with haemophilia and their*

families feel a sense of injustice, I am not convinced that a public inquiry would provide greater insight into the problem or pave the way for any further improvements in the safety controls which are now in place." I have been asked about the research, investigations, enquiries or analysis undertaken and by whom, to reach those conclusions. Given the passage of time I cannot recall any details of the research undertaken, or by whom, but I am confident to say that such investigations would have been undertaken at that time, in order for me to state that within my reply.

- 2.13 I am also asked about the line that a '*great deal of careful thought*' had been given by me and my advisers to "*a range of issues associated with haemophilia*". It goes without saying that there would have been multiple discussions around the range of issues associated with haemophilia including discussions between various ministers and departments with constituents and campaign groups.
- 2.14 At Q8c-d I have been asked why I declined to meet the Haemophilia Society and why I was unconvinced of the need for a public inquiry. The second question answers the first; namely that I was told the purpose of the meeting was regarding a call for a public inquiry. The letter dated 11th May 1999 from Lord Morris stated "*We have been asked by the Haemophilia Society to request a meeting with you to discuss their call for a public inquiry...*" As I indicated in my reply to Lord Morris dated 23 June 1999, I did not consider that there was a need for a public inquiry because I did not think it was justified, nor was I convinced that it would provide any greater insight into what had happened. As Prime Minister, my time was in high demand and it was simply not possible to meet with every party who requested a meeting. This did not diminish the importance of the topic they wanted to discuss, but my Private Office would have to prioritise my time in the most efficient manner. In addition, meeting requests to the Prime Minister would be forwarded to the various Government departments to consider arranging their own ministerial meetings with parties, if appropriate.
- 2.15 I have been asked about the line in my letter dated 6th August 1999 in response to a further letter from Lord Morris dated 1st July 1999 in which I stated "*I believe that it is best to take steps which are positive and which look to the future.*" By this I meant that it was time to draw a line under what had happened and move forward, safe in the knowledge that the medical advancements meant that infected blood was no longer being given, and the vast improvements in the treatment for those with HIV.
- 2.16 On 23 November 1999 the 'Carpet of Lilies' campaign attended Downing Street again to present 113 white lilies. I note that Lord Philip Hunt met with Chris Hodgson and Karin

Pappenheim on 30 November 1999, which was a week later. In Q10 I am asked whether I was briefed on the outcome of that meeting and whether the 'new facts' outlined Chris Hodgson's letter lead to a reconsideration or review of the Government's position on whether a public inquiry was justified. I cannot recall being briefed on the outcome of that meeting and I have not been provided with any documents to confirm that I was. Again, with the passage of time and number of matters a Prime Minister is sighted on, I cannot recall if I specifically reviewed the position in respect of a public inquiry at that point.

- 2.17 I note that on 14 November 2001 I was asked the following question by Jackie Lawrence, the MP for Preseli Pembrokeshire:

"Is the Prime Minister aware of the carpet of lilies campaign currently being run by the Haemophilia Society on behalf of those haemophiliacs who have been infected with hepatitis C or AIDS as a result of contaminated blood products? Can he give an assurance that the Government will consider the society's requests for action and, in particular, the availability of the blood treatment product, recombinant, throughout the UK, and not just in Wales and Scotland?"

- 2.18 My response was:

"We are prepared to look at the blood treatment product and how we can help people in that situation. What I cannot offer my hon. Friend is support for the entire range of demands made by that campaign. We sympathise with it and we understand the problems that people face, but she will know that successive Governments have made it clear that there is a limit to the amount of compensation that we can pay."

WITN7199002.

- 2.19 In Q10 I am also asked about the inquiries of other countries such as Canada, France and Ireland and whether the findings of those had any impact on my Government's continuing decision not to hold a full public inquiry. I have no recollection and I have not seen any documents to suggest that those inquiries impacted upon the decision not to hold a full public inquiry

- 2.20 At Q11 I am asked to respond to the evidence Karin Pappenheim (Chief Executive of the Haemophilia Society from 1998 to 2004) gave to this inquiry, in particular her statement that *"We had to continue campaigning incessantly throughout my entire time with the Society. And it was only...towards the later stage of my tenure that there was any form of response from the Government to our appeal. So it was a campaign that we had to keep running, and I think, as I said earlier, their actions -- the Government must be judged*

by their actions. And the response was long delayed." (INQY1000123). I can see from the documents provided to me by this inquiry that Karin Pappenheim campaigned tirelessly and I commend her for that.

- 2.21 At Q12 I am asked if I was made aware of a letter in the spring of 2000 from haemophilia campaigner Carol Grayson sent to myself and the Secretary of State Alan Milburn calling for a public inquiry. I understand that a response was sent by a member of the Health Services Directorate. Whilst I cannot recall if I was made aware of the letter and I have not seen any documents to indicate that I was, I think it unlikely that I would have seen it because staff in my private office handled incoming correspondence and passed it to the correct teams for responses.
- 2.22 In Q13 I am referred to a regional newspaper article in which Ms Grayson stated: "*I have written an enormous number of letters to Tony Blair down the years but have yet to receive a reply.*" I have been asked to comment on this statement. I accept that Ms Grayson appears to have sent a number of letters to me, as Prime Minister, but as I am sure this inquiry is already aware, the Prime Minister only sees a fraction of the correspondence sent to them because their Private Office 'filters' it, in effect, to ensure that matters are passed to the relevant department and that only absolutely essential correspondence is passed to the Prime Minister to read, noting the volume of papers one must read daily.
- 2.23 The article also refers to a letter to me from Lord Morris (**WITN4680002**). I have been asked to provide a copy of my response, or that of a Government representative. Again, Cabinet Office staff have conducted document searches and a response has not been located.
- 2.24 At Q14 I have been asked about the 'blood rally' Ms Grayson describes in her statement to this Inquiry which took place on 03 April 2001 during which mock blood supply bags were used. Whilst I have a recollection of mock blood supply bags, I cannot say whether the recollection relates to the time of this event, or subsequent references made to it. I am unable to say whether any action was taken by the government specifically in response to that rally.
- 2.25 In Q15 I have been directed towards various letters from campaigners and members of the public calling for a public inquiry, together with various replies. I am aware and accept that many letters from campaigners and members of the public were sent to me calling for a public enquiry and that replies were sent. As noted above, although correspondence is addressed to the Prime Minister, it is handled by the Private Office

and only a fraction of the correspondence sent to the PM is ever seen by the PM because we have to rely on Private Office to filter correspondence and either send it on to the relevant government department to handle, or file it in case of future reference.

- 2.26 I have reviewed an annotated draft of Lord Hunt's letter to Mr GRO-A **DHSC0042298_138**; the annotations are in red and include the name 'Tony'. I can confirm that these were not my annotations and so I cannot answer why a specific line was queried.
- 2.27 At Q16 I am asked about the correspondence in February 2007 between Philip Dolan, Chairman of the Scottish Haemophilia Forum and myself, in which he sought a public inquiry. I am asked what consideration, if any, I gave to the arguments put forward by Mr Dolan for a public inquiry and I am asked to provide copies of any submissions or briefings I received to respond to Mr Dolan's letter. Cabinet Office staff have been unable to locate any submissions relating to this correspondence and I cannot recall specific consideration given to the arguments put forward by Mr Dolan, but I would hope that due consideration was given at the time.
- 2.28 At Q17 and 18 I am asked whether at any point during my tenure as Prime Minister I considered that a public inquiry was justified and also what guidance existed as to the circumstances in which the Government might agree to establish an inquiry. I cannot recall any specific guidance regarding inquiries but my view was that holding a public inquiry into contaminated blood would be purposeless because it seemed to me to be widely known what had happened and measures had been put in place to prevent it from happening again (i.e. heat treating blood products). I do wish to make it clear that the decision not to hold a public inquiry did not mean there was no sympathy for those infected and affected. I recognised then that it was a tragedy but simply did not feel that an inquiry would in any way assist anyone because the facts were known and the lessons had been learnt.
- 2.29 I am asked whether I ever questioned the accuracy of the following government line to take, "*The Government of the day acted in good faith, relying on the technology available at the time*". I cannot say whether or not I questioned the accuracy of that specific line, however, as Prime Minister, one has to rely on many staff and special advisors to complete background work in respect of any correspondence and I was confident in the overall reply, otherwise I would not have signed it.
- 2.30 I understand that the former Secretary of State for Health, Lord Fowler said in evidence to this inquiry that the Government should have established a UK-wide public inquiry

before it did and I have been asked for my view on that observation. Lord Fowler was in that post between 1981 and 1987. I agree with Lord Fowler that an inquiry 40 years after an event is less helpful than an inquiry, perhaps even 10 years afterwards, in terms of recollections and document availability, but as stated earlier in this statement, I had my reasons for believing that a public inquiry was not required.

- 2.31 At Q19 I am asked about my reflections on how successive Governments handled calls for a public inquiry. It appears that successive Governments held a similar view to me, namely that an inquiry was not justified and would not add value, hence their refusals.

Section 3 – The Archer Inquiry

3.1 I am aware that towards the end of my premiership Lord Archer of Sandwell commenced his independent inquiry into contaminated blood (in February 2007). At Q20 I am asked about any involvement I had in the Department of Health's ("DH") decision of whether to engage with the 'Archer Inquiry', including any briefings I received. Cabinet Office staff have searched for any relevant documents relating to this question and have been unable to locate any such briefings. I cannot recall any particular involvement in DH's decision-making around that inquiry. I was probably made aware of the inquiry being set up but do not have a specific recollection relating to it.

3.2 I have also been asked about my understanding of DH's approach to the 'Archer Inquiry' and whether I considered the approach to be appropriate. From the documents provided to me by this Inquiry it appears that DH wrote to Lord Archer of Sandwell to confirm that it would assist as far as it could, share the results of their own internal review and provide access to documents. This appears to be a reasonable and collaborative approach.

3.3 At Q21 I have been asked about a letter from me to the widow of an infected victim dated 8th May 2007, responding to her request dated 07 February 2007, *inter alia*, for a public inquiry. Whilst I cannot recall why I decided to respond to her, I can say that it was not because she was due to give evidence to the Archer Inquiry. The reason I say that is because I note from **DHSC5468140** that she had given evidence on 18 April 2007.

3.4 I have been asked about the words "*We have been open and transparent on this issue*" within my response. I simply cannot recall any particular detail regarding this line, but I believe it was an accurate representation of my view at the time when I signed the response.

3.5 At Q22 I am asked for my present view on the Government's decision not to provide

witnesses to the Archer Inquiry. I do not feel able to comment on this because to the best of my recollection I was not briefed on, nor involved with, the Archer Inquiry in any way.

Section 4 – Other issues

4.1 Whilst I have been given an opportunity to provide any further comments about matters of relevance to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, I do not have anything to add at this stage. Whilst it appears from the papers that I had very little involvement in this matter and very few recollections, I do hope I have been able to assist the Inquiry and if I have any further thoughts or recollections then I will certainly contact the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed GRO-C_____

Dated _____ 31 August 2022 _____

Table of exhibits:

Date	Notes/ Description	Exhibit number
14.11.2001	Hansard extract	WITN7199002