

Witness Name: Eleanor Plowden

Statement No.: WITN7697001

Exhibits: WITN7697002 – WITN7697009

Dated: 21.07.2023

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ELEANOR PLOWDEN**

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I, Eleanor Plowden, of 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, BBC New Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA, will say as follows:-

1. I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9(1) and (2) of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 29 June 2023. I have been asked to address the following matters:

#### **Introduction**

**Please set out your name, address, date of birth and any professional qualifications relevant to the duties you discharged while you worked on the Panorama programme as a journalist/producer.**

2. My name is Eleanor Plowden and I was born on GRO-C 1969. I currently work as a Senior Journalist (Producer) for the British Broadcasting Corporation (**BBC**) Panorama team, which sits in the BBC Current Affairs group. I started working in a permanent role with Panorama in 2003. My responsibilities as a Senior Journalist (Producer) include research and development, journalism, directing, interviewing, commissioning graphics, script writing, edit producing (offline and online), editorial and legal compliance, associated external news/publicity and rolling out internal BBC programme content /coverage.

**Please outline your employment history including the various roles and responsibilities that you have held throughout your career, as well as the dates.**

3. I've worked for the BBC in various roles since 1992:
  - a. Between 1992 and 1994, I worked as a Production Assistant in the Brazilian section of BBC World Service, where I worked with journalists on live and recorded radio programmes in Portuguese for Brazilian audiences. My responsibilities included research, studio production, and working as a producer.
  - b. Between 1994 and 2002, I worked on the BBC Radio 4 Today Programme in various roles, including as a Researcher, and working up to being an Assistant Editor. By the end, my responsibilities included commissioning/forward planning, output/overnight editor of the live daily programme, day editor, commissioning stories and planning the next day's programme, and managing a team of producers, reporters and presenters.
  - c. In 2015, I worked as a Planning Producer for the new Victoria Derbyshire Programme which was broadcast on BBC News Channel/BBC 2. During that time, I produced short films and arranged interviews/discussions for the live programme.

**Please outline any involvement you have had with any committees, working parties or groups relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.**

4. As a function of my role as journalist and a producer of this programme, and due to my ongoing interest in the issue, I have over the years been in contact with a number of organisations, groups and individuals relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. These include but are not limited to; affected individuals, groups representing those affected, all party parliamentary groups, members of both houses of Parliament, lawyers and legal firms acting for those affected.

Any involvement was part of, and limited to, normal research and journalistic processes.

**Please confirm whether you have provided evidence to, or have 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. Please provide details of your involvement and copies of any statements or reports which you provided.**

5. Other than my involvement limited to that outlined in point 4 I have not provided evidence to, or have 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.

**The evidence of David Watters (W3429) to the Infected Blood Inquiry**

At paragraphs 100 and 228 of his witness statement [WITN3429001] and at page 93 of the transcript of his oral evidence [INQY1000094], Inquiry witness David Watters describes his participation in a Panorama documentary in May 2017. Mr Watters’ evidence can be found on the Inquiry website by following the links provided. Mr Watters states that he was shown “a very heavily redacted letter that came from a branch of the Department of Health”. The Inquiry understands that you produced the May 2017 documentary, visited Mr Watters’ home and showed him the letter described above.

**(i) Please provide the Inquiry with an account of the circumstances described above by David Watters in his evidence.**

6. I have read the relevant extracts of Mr Watters’ witness statement dated 18 January 2021; and the relevant extracts of his oral testimony from 9 February

2021. In his evidence, Mr Watters describes being shown by Panorama in May 2017 a “heavily redacted letter written to Professor Bloom appearing to warn him of the potential risk of AIDS”. He says that he did not retain a copy of that letter. Mr Watters also says that he believes it came from “governmental health bodies” and also “a branch of the Department of Health”.

7. Between 2016 and 2017, I worked, as part of the Panorama team on a programme titled “*Contaminated Blood: The Search for Truth*”. The programme was first broadcast on 10 May 2017. Naturally, my recollection of events is impacted by the lapse of time, but I have considered this matter carefully and reminded myself of relevant materials that were available to me and materials that were shown to Mr Watters. I set out below my recollection of events.

#### **Documents shown to Mr Watters**

8. On 26 January 2017, I travelled with the Panorama team to Cornwall to interview Mr Watters about his experience of the contaminated blood issue during his time as General Secretary of the Haemophilia Society in the 1980s-90s. During the filmed interview, I believe we showed Mr Watters seven documents. These documents included a newspaper article, a letter to Professor Bloom, minutes of a meeting and other historical documents. I have provided them to the Inquiry:
  - a. The first document was a copy of an article from the Mail on Sunday (1 May 1983) [WITN7697002]. My understanding is that this article prompted the Haemophilia Society to seek the advice of Professor Arthur Bloom, who was at the time, the Chairman of the Haemophilia Centre Directors and a member of the Haemophilia Society’s Medical Advisory Panel. I understand the Haemophilia Society subsequently sent a statement from Professor Bloom to its members. This newspaper article is not redacted.
  - b. The second document was a copy of Professor Bloom’s statement dated 4 May 1983 which I believe was sent out by the Haemophilia Society [WITN7697003]. This document is not redacted.

- c. The third document was a letter dated 26 August 1983, which appears to be from the Department of Health (Lord Glenarthur) to Clive Jenkin, Association of Scientific and Technical and Managerial Staffs [WITN7697004]. This letter makes a reference to the Haemophilia Society's opposition at the time to banning US blood products. The only redaction in this letter is a telephone number.
  - d. The fourth document was an appendix from the Penrose Inquiry [WITN7697005] which shows figures from the Haemophilia Society annual reports from 1982 – 1992 for funding by manufacturers of blood products and other pharmaceutical companies. This document is not redacted.
  - e. The fifth document was a letter to Professor Bloom dated 27 July 1983 from J.W.G Smith, of the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control [WITN7697006]. It referred to a meeting of the Committee on the Safety of Medicines, which had considered AIDS and had endorsed recommendations of a CSM sub-Committee. This letter is not redacted at all.
  - f. The sixth document was minutes of a meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicine, Sub-Committee on Biological Products [WITN7697007]. It shows that the meeting was held on 13 July 1983. It seems this was the meeting referenced in [WITN7697006], the letter to Professor Bloom dated 27 July 1983. These minutes of the meeting are not heavily redacted, although the names of all those attending are redacted, as well as a few other notes on the last page.
  - g. The seventh document was a letter from John Major (then Treasury Minister) to Tony Newton (then Health Minister) about a meeting with the Haemophilia Society [WITN7697008]. This letter is not redacted.
9. From the documents listed above and exhibited to this statement, it is difficult to be sure which document(s) Mr Watters was referring to in his evidence to the Inquiry. This is because none of the documents we showed Mr Watters match the letter he described. The letter to Professor Bloom at WITN7697006 referred

to a meeting as described in paragraph 7(e) and does not include the type of information that he describes. Some of the dates of the documents do not match what he recollects. The other documents are not letters to Professor Bloom or letters at all, and none of the documents were "heavily redacted". Notwithstanding that I am not in a position to know precisely what document Mr Watters was referring to, and because these documents are in the public domain, I have provided to the Inquiry a copy of all of the documents that I recollect were shown to him by BBC Panorama.

### **Other documents**

10. The broadcast programme also referred to a letter from Bruce Evatt, of the Center for Disease Control in the United States to Professor Bloom in March 1983 [WITN7697009]. This document was shown on screen in the programme with relevant text highlighted. In the programme, the commentary stated:

*"But it's now clear that Professor Bloom knew much more than he was telling. 8 weeks before he wrote to patients, he received this letter, which has only recently been made public. In it, a leading American specialist, Dr Bruce Evatt, tells Bloom that there are already 13 haemophiliacs with AIDS in the US. They had all been given Factor 8. It would only be a matter of time, Evatt suspected, before cases appeared in the UK".*

11. To the best of my recollection, I do not believe this document was shown to Mr Watters during or after our interview with him. It does not match his recollection; it is not redacted and was not from a health body in this country, but it was referred to in the programme and it may be that Mr Watters remembers it for this reason. My understanding is that this document has been released by the National Archives.

### **Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

**GRO-C**

Dated 21st July 2023