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THE CABINET OFFICE
LONDON SW1A 2AS

From the National Security Adviser

28 March 2022

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REQUEST FOR EVIDENCE

I am writing in response to your request for evidence on decision making around the evacuation of Nowzad staff from Afghanistan last August. As communicated to the Clerks of the Committee, the demands of the Russia-Ukraine crisis and the short notice mean that I am unfortunately not able to attend your hearings in person this week.

Let me start by saying that, with respect to the evacuation from Kabul, all decisions were made on the basis of constant, regular consultation across Whitehall. During the evacuation, I, or the Deputy National Security Adviser, chaired daily meetings with senior officials and defence personnel to ensure that critical information was brought together in one place, so that operational decisions could be made by officials in real time and in line with NSC priorities. The scale and challenging circumstances meant decisions on prioritisation had to be made quickly to ensure we could help as many people as possible.

I, and others in Whitehall, have been clear that the Prime Minister himself had no direct involvement in decisions around Nowzad. Lord Ahmed explained this most recently in his letter to you on 23 March. Sir Philip Barton set out in more detail the prioritisation in his letter on 17 March. Nowzad's Afghan staff were considered for evacuation under the Leave Outside The Rules (LOTR) provision.

On 25 August, the Defence Secretary confirmed that there was capacity to facilitate Pen Farthing's flight. He tweeted:

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'Now that Pen Farthing's staff have been cleared to come forward under LOTR I have authorised MOD to facilitate their processing alongside all other eligible personnel at HKIA [Kabul airport]. At this stage, if he arrives with his animals we will seek a slot for his plane.'

Following this I confirmed to a senior FCDO official later that morning that they should proceed to call forward the Nowzad group. The Taleban prevented Nowzad's Afghan staff from entering Kabul Airport, and they therefore were not evacuated either then, or later, on an RAF flight. UK military planners facilitated access for Pen Farthing's private charter to evacuate him, and the animals, but only after the final RAF flights had left.

I hope you find the above helpful. Please do get in touch with my office and I would be happy to consider any specific questions that arise from your hearings.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephen Lovegrove". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line to its right.

STEPHEN LOVEGROVE