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The Rt. Hon the Lord Ashton of Hyde

Chair, International Relations and Defence
Committee
House of Lords
SW1A 0AA

23 October 2023

By email

Dear Lord Ashton,

Thank you for your letter of 19th October from the Lords International Relations and Defence Committee. I am grateful to the Committee for affording me the opportunity to contribute to its important report on the Arctic.

I wanted to send my sincere apologies to you personally, and to the whole Committee, for not being able to attend your Committee hearing on 18th October. Following Lord Goldsmith's resignation in June, I was initially given interim responsibility for the Overseas Territories and Polar Regions. For several weeks, there was uncertainty as to whether I would retain these responsibilities. I was also involved in an extensive pre-existing Ministerial travel schedule.

During this time, I am afraid that I was not informed by my Private Office of the Committee's requests for an appearance in September or October. Regretfully, I was only advised of the potential 18th October appearance on 3rd October, during a Ministerial visit to the Turks and Caicos Islands. I hope you will appreciate that this did not leave me enough time to adequately prepare for this hearing. In addition, it was important for the lead FCDO official for Polar Regions to join me in the hearing, but she was away until November. For these reasons, I sought to appear before your Committee in November. I, of course, now appreciate that this did not work for your publication schedule.

Please be assured that I have urgently reviewed processes with my team, making very clear the supremacy of Parliament and its Committees, and that I should be fully notified of any pending Parliamentary engagement as soon as an invite is extended to me.

I have instructed my officials that a response to your Committee's letter is a priority. You can be assured that this will be with you in time for your deadline.

Once again, please accept my sincere apologies for any inconvenience and frustration that this situation has caused you and your Committee.

With all best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Rutley', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

David Rutley MP
Minister for Americas and the Caribbean