



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

3 February 1982

Dear John,

Mr Mark Thatcher

You asked for advice on (a) the costs of the search and rescue operation; and (b) (your letter of 3 February) the line to be used in responding to inquiries on this subject.

It appears to us that the costs which we should seek to recover in this case are those listed in items 1-4 of the attached statement, totalling £531.21. For reasons explained below, however, the actual charge to be levied should be the rather higher figure of £583.14. These costs are primarily those we should normally consider 'consular'; we do not think it right to seek recovery of those costs incurred for primarily 'diplomatic' reasons.

Perhaps it would help if I explained in rather more detail the criteria we have adopted. The normal rules have given us some guidance, but in such a case as this there are inevitably considerable grey areas where we have had to rely on judgement. In order to make sure that the outcome is readily defensible in the kind of terms you have in mind, we have in cases of doubt opted for the higher charge to the Prime Minister. We have divided the cost into three categories:

- (a) Normal 'consular' costs;
- (b) Normal 'diplomacy' costs;
- (c) Others (ie 'possibly recoverable').

Items 1-3 in the attached statement are unusual. If it is necessary for a consular official to attend at a place other than consular premises, it is normal to charge fee 37 in the Consular Fees Table. In this case, the total fee would be £412.50, and though this is higher than the actual cost of £360.57 shown in the table, we believe that it would be right for this higher sum to be recovered.

Item 4 in the statement is the cost of accommodating the Swiss Rally Team for an extra night in Bamako. I understand that you asked that the team leader be asked to stay on, and that the bill be sent to you. This item is not a proper charge to public funds and if it has been so charged we believe that it should be recovered.

We did. because at that time he was the last person who had seen Noel and we might have needed him to go back to locate the position. A.J.C. 4/2



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The bulk (over 75 per cent) of the remaining costs (items 5-9 in the attached statement) relate to telegrams and telephone calls. These can properly be attributed to normal consular costs, or in the case of messages of thanks (including translations) from the Prime Minister, Mr Denis Thatcher and Mr Mark Thatcher to Heads of States or Governments, Government officials and so on, to 'diplomacy'. We regard these as a proper charge to the FCO. The cost of messages of thanks is not listed separately in the statement. We do not believe that it would be either reasonable or practical to treat those messages sent by other members of the Prime Minister's family as different from those which she sent herself. The services provided by foreign authorities were so provided by virtue of the relationship of Mr Denis Thatcher and Mr Mark Thatcher to the Prime Minister, and they were obliged to send messages of thanks for reasons of diplomacy- the only consideration in the case of members of the public would be that of courtesy.

Apart from the costs shown in the statement, which are readily identifiable, there are other costs not included, notably man hours spent on the case, both in London and abroad, and local telephone calls in London. These have not been included because, apart from the fact that it would be almost impossible to arrive at any sort of accurate figure, it is not normal consular practice to charge such costs over and above statutory fees or actual expenses.

As regards the line to take in answer to inquiries, the line you suggested in your letter of 3 February seems to us appropriate, but we would suggest that it be modified so as to limit it to the cost of the search and rescue operation, and to exclude the diplomatic costs of the various messages of thanks. It would then read as follows:

'No charges have been made to official funds for the cost of the search and rescue operation other than those which would be so charged in the case of any UK citizen in distress. All other bills which have been raised have been met by Mrs Thatcher personally.

'The total cost to the UK taxpayer, which consists of those expenses which the Government would meet in the case of assistance for any UK citizen in distress, amounts to (a figure will have to be inserted later).

'The major part of the expenses was met by the Algerian Government. Mrs Thatcher has expressed her gratitude for their generosity. The Governments of France and Mali also contributed to the operation at their own expense and similar thanks have been expressed.

'No charge has been made to official funds in regard to the hotel expenses in Tamanrasset of Mr Denis Thatcher, Mr Mark Thatcher or the accompanying British officials.'

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A J Coles Esq
Private Secretary
No.10 Downing St

Yours ever.

(F N Richards)
Private Secretary

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Francis Richards', written in a cursive style.

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