

RESTRICTED



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

3 August 1982

Dear John,

Type letter pl.

1023/8.

Thank you for your letter of 30 July enclosing one from Mr Topping to the Prime Minister about the kidnapping of his brother-in-law in Zimbabwe. As requested, I attach a draft reply from you to Mr Topping.

Let me first say that Mr Topping by now appears fully content with the degree of contact with the Department, and has expressed on the telephone appreciation for all the help he has received.

The telegram from our High Commission in Harare with the first report of the kidnapping was received at 1.00 pm on Saturday 24 July: unfortunately this did not allow sufficient time to inform next-of-kin before the BBC 1 o'clock news. The Duty Officer spoke to Mr Topping that afternoon, but in the absence of any further significant developments at that early stage, 'Encounter Overland', the tour organisers, acted as the general liaison point with the next-of-kin. By 27 July the Department decided that it would be better to institute a system of daily contact with the next-of-kin, even when we had nothing new to report. We subsequently kept this up on a regular basis. When, however, a member of the Department spoke to Mr Topping on 31 July, he said that in future he and his wife would be content for us to contact them only if there is anything of substance to pass on. This is where matters stand at present.

Yours ever,

(F N Richards)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street

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DRAFT: ~~xxxxxx~~/letter/~~teletype~~/~~despatch~~/~~note~~

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM:

Reference

PS/Prime Minister

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO:

Your Reference

- Top Secret
- Secret
- Confidential
- Restricted
- Unclassified

G Topping Esq  
 17 Firbank  
 Euxton  
 Chorley  
 Lancashire PR7 6HP

Copies to:

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

CAVEAT.....

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter of 27 July about the kidnapping of your brother-in-law in Zimbabwe. She understands how distressing this <sup>to</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>must</sup> ~~be~~ for you and other members of the family and you have her warmest sympathy.

I am sorry that you feel the Foreign and Commonwealth Office failed to keep you sufficiently informed about developments. It is most unfortunate that you should have first learned of this incident from the radio. But, ~~as~~ <sup>had</sup> ~~I hope you will agree, it was essential for~~ the Foreign and Commonwealth Office <sup>L</sup> to check the facts with the British High Commission in Harare before contacting the relatives. This inevitably took a little longer, but I understand that you were given as much information as they had on the afternoon of Saturday 24 July. Over the next two days, in the absence of any significant developments the FCO kept in contact with 'Encounter Overland', supplying them with information to pass on to the families.

Enclosures—flag(s).....



As the situation has developed, a member of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Godson) has been in regular touch with you and your wife in order to keep you up-to-date. We have done this rather than contact Mrs Hodgson direct on the suggestion of Mrs Topping, who has said that she would herself prefer to pass on any information to your mother-in-law.

We are in close touch with the Zimbabwe Government at the highest levels, and some of our own people are in the search area. I can assure you that we are doing our best to secure the release of the six. Meanwhile, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will continue to keep you and Mrs Topping informed.

RM  $\frac{3}{8}$





10 DOWNING STREET

cc: FCO

*From the Private Secretary*

3 August, 1982

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter of 27 July about the kidnapping of your brother-in-law in Zimbabwe. She understands how distressing this situation is for you and other members of the family and you have her warmest sympathy.

I am sorry that you feel the Foreign and Commonwealth Office failed to keep you sufficiently informed about developments. It is most unfortunate that you should have first learned of this incident from the radio. But the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had to check the facts with the British High Commission in Harare before contacting the relatives. This inevitably took a little longer, but I understand that you were given as much information as they had on the afternoon of Saturday, 24 July. Over the next two days, in the absence of any significant developments the FCO kept in contact with 'Encounter Overland', supplying them with information to pass on to the families.

As the situation has developed, a member of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Godson) has been in regular touch with you and your wife in order to keep you up-to-date. We have done this rather than contact Mrs Hodgson direct on the suggestion of Mrs Topping, who has said that she would herself prefer to pass on any information to your mother-in-law.

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A. J. COLES

G Topping, Esq.,





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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

30 July 1982

BF

Zimbabwe

I enclose a copy of a letter the Prime Minister has received from Mr. G. Topping concerning Mrs. Ella Hodgson's son who is one of the British citizens at present held by terrorists in Zimbabwe.

I should like to send a reply on behalf of the Prime Minister very early next week and should be grateful for a draft during the course of Monday if possible. You will note that Mr. Topping complains that Mrs. Hodgson has received no information from the FCO about the situation. You may think it would be a good idea for her to be telephoned immediately.

A. J. COLES

Francis Richards, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

30 July 1982

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your letter of 27 July. This is receiving attention and you will be sent a reply as soon as possible.

A. J. COLES

G. Topping, Esq.



17 FIRBANK

EUXTON

CHORLEY

LANCS

PR7 6HP

27.7.82

Dear Mrs Thatcher,

I am writing on behalf of my wife's mother, Mrs Ella Hodgson, whose son is one of the British captured by the rebels in Zimbabwe. I am sure that after your own recent experience, you will be aware that this is a very harrowing time for both my wife and her mother.

My mother-in-law first heard of her son's capture on the 1-00 PM news on Saturday - a terrible shock for a 70 year old. Surely the initial contact should have been made through the Foreign Office prior to the release of names to the press.

Secondly, we have had no contact whatsoever from the Foreign Office in spite of my request to them to be kept fully informed of the situation. We have of course, sought information from elsewhere, the local M.P. and the travel company involved, but this tends to be opinion rather than fact and I am sure that you are only too well aware of the inaccuracies which abound in media reporting. As far as we are aware, the F.O. may be sat on their backsides playing cards. I am sure that they are not; but it would be reassuring to know what is being done to help the unfortunate men and to establish some regular contact with them.

I would be grateful if you would ensure that this is done and that the maximum assistance and pressure is applied to the situation.

Yours sincerely, Mr G. Topping (G. TOPPING)