



FROM THE MINISTER OF STATE

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CONFIDENTIAL

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP
The Secretary of State for Social Services
Department of Health & Social Security
Alexander Fleming House
Elephant and Castle
LONDON
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17th October 1986

Mr. Norman,

SCREENING FOR AIDS

As you know, I have just returned from representing the United Kingdom at the 8th Commonwealth Health Ministers' Meeting in Nassau.

A full report of the discussions will follow in due course but one matter of concern, which I feel bound to bring to your immediate attention is the reaction of certain African countries to recent reports (notably the Daily Telegraph article) that the UK might introduce screening for AIDS at the port of entry. I had discussions with, particularly, Health Ministers of Uganda and Tanzania who stressed their grave concern. The matter was also raised in general terms by other countries.

There is considerable depth of feeling but I explained that there was no substance to the press speculation. Whilst stressing that no decision to implement screening had been taken I explained that the serious problems which AIDS poses for the UK was bound to lead to consideration of a number of options.

Both Tanzania and Uganda are prepared to take strong and immediate retaliatory action should we implement screening. The Ugandan Chief Medical Officer stated that they had diagnostic equipment which they would use to screen all UK citizens within Uganda (including all High Commission staff) as well all UK citizens seeking entry to that country.

The strength of feeling amongst the Commonwealth on this issue is as I have said considerable. It is my view that, whilst not in any way minimising the seriousness of the UK's problem, any introduction of screening for Commonwealth visitors would have very damaging consequences for our relations with many Commonwealth countries and give rise to results out of all proportion to the threat their particular countries pose to our AIDS problem.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary,
Members of H and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours,
Glenarthur*

GLENARTHUR

