

Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

8 September 1990

Dear Charles,

**HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE OF REFUGEES FROM IRAQ**

In your letter of 5 September, <sup>to Richard Gwynne</sup> you expressed the Prime Minister's wish to see more emergency relief for Jordan and for a prompt and positive follow up to Richard Branson's suggestion for practical help i.e. tents and blankets to the refugees stranded there. *copy attached*

Your letter crossed with <sup>the Private Secretary's</sup> mine the same day about the announcement made by the Prime Minister in the Emergency Debate yesterday of a £2 million contribution to UNDRO and to the International Organisation for Migration who are organising the evacuation of the refugees. As for tents and blankets, the ODAS have already made available £500,000 to the Jordanian Red Crescent through the ICRC to spend on whatever was most urgently required, as well as £100,000 worth of blankets and medical supplies which was taken to Amman by Richard Branson in his plane on 5 September. We have also contributed almost £3m through the European Community.

But given the increasingly desperate situation of the 100,000 refugees on the Jordanian border and the likelihood that the international agencies are not able to cope in the short term, we have been considering with the Aid Wing what more we can do both nationally and by energising the international community before more refugees start dying. The strong public support for the measures so far taken against Iraq could start to erode rapidly both at home and overseas if the international community does not simultaneously address the problem of the refugees urgently. As a first step, the Secretary of State has asked Mrs Chalker to fly to Jordan as soon as possible next week (probably on Tuesday) to see how our assistance is being used and what more can be done to crank up the international relief effort.

/Internationally



Internationally, there needs to be a single individual (such as Sadruddin Khan) in a visible presence on the media, who can give an impetus and who is demonstrably in charge of coordinating all humanitarian assistance. And a major international air and sea evacuation must be set in hand urgently.

The UN Secretary General activated UNDRO (UN Disaster Relief Organisation) as a coordinating centre on 28 August, rather than appoint a Special Representative as we had urged. This has not (as we feared) proved effective. If the Prime Minister agrees, when Sir David Hannay presents his credentials to the UNSG in New York on 10 September, he could be instructed to express Mrs Thatcher's profound concern about the situation of the refugees and urge Senor Perez De Cuellar to appoint a Special Representative who could work with UNDRO, the appropriate agencies within the UN system and without (the ICRC and the International Organisation for Migration) and all those countries and relief organisations in the international community who wish to help.

A major air (and sea) evacuation would need massive funding and a coordinated effort by the international agencies who are experts i.e. the IOM, the IRCRC, the UN and its agencies including ICAO (the intergovernmental body dealing with air transport, including overflights and special routings) and IATA (on which the airlines are represented). In order to generate the necessary support and publicity, we might consider the following:

- a) An urgent appeal at the highest level to King Fahd and the Amir of Kuwait to ask them to make available the necessary funds to finance a major airlift. They are likely to find it easier to respond to an appeal for humanitarian assistance than for aid to Jordan, with whose monarch they are pretty disenchanted. The Saudis should also be asked if they could provide personnel and technical help i.e. temporary accommodation and equipment such as water trucks to help the refugees immediately. They have considerable experience from the Haj in dealing with large influxes of people. The Japanese could also be tapped as could the Germans.
- b) One or more British airlines to announce publicly their willingness to make a plane or planes available immediately to the IOM. Mr Branson is in regular touch with the ODA and might well respond enthusiastically. British airlines to seek to mobilise their colleagues in IATA to support a once for all emergency exercise. (On the basis of Arab funding, the airlines might be willing to respond).
- c) An approach to the Jordanian authorities to ask them to arrange a round-the-clock airlift not only from Amman airport, but also possibly from other nearby military airports. This could be coupled with an offer of trained personnel (e.g. air traffic controllers and other airport technicians) to help. If the CAA are not able to help, we might need to turn to the military.



d) an approach to the countries whose nationals are principally affected (e.g. Egypt, Phillipines, India, Bangladesh) and to encourage them to offer planes and ships as part of an international evacuation;

e) in slower time, a major effort to evacuate the rump of the foreign workers who have been unable to leave Kuwait, possibly by seas.

f) Also in slower time, an offer of a British hospital ship.

These are very ambitious ideas which will need further fleshing out, but there is catastrophe in the making. If refugees start dying in large numbers, public opinion will tend to blame the West for not doing enough rather than recall Iraqi responsibility for destabilising and ruining entire communities. The main responsibility for coordinating the international response must be with the UN. A distinctively British gesture would help keep international solidarity against Iraq and have considerable propoganda advantages. It would also undercut Saddam Hussain's attempted blackmail of such countries as India and the Phillipines by using their trapped communities as a means of securing food imports against the UN embargo. At all stages we should make clear that their disastrous situation is directly attributable to Saddam Hussain's inhumane acts. Although we look to have the main financial costs borne by the Gulf States and Japan, there could be financial implications, but we will seek to ensure that some of the EC money is designated for the airlift.

If the Prime Minister agrees, messages will be prepared to King Fahd and the Amir of Kuwait and to Prime Minister Kaifu, together with instructions to Sir David Hannay.

I am copying this letter to Sara Gillett, John Gieve, Simon Webb the PS to the Secretary of State for Transport.

*Yours sincerely  
Dominic Asquith*

Dominic Asquith  
PS/Mr Waldegrave

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LOCATION OF FOREIGN NATIONALS WHO WERE TRAPPED IN IRAQ/KUWAIT AS AT 7 SEPTEMBER

| COUNTRY       | TOTAL IN IRAQ/KUWAIT ON 2 AUGUST | IN JORDAN     | NO MAN'S LAND OR ON WAY TO JORDAN | IN OR ON WAY TO TURKEY | IN OR ON WAY TO SAUDI ARABIA | IN OR ON WAY TO IRAN | REPATRIATED     | STILL IN IRAQ/KUWAIT       |
|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Bangladesh    | 85,000                           | 12,000+       | 12-15,000                         | 15,000                 | 6,000                        |                      | 1,200           | 35-40,000                  |
| India         | 180,000                          | 3-5,000       | 15,000+                           |                        |                              | 100,000              | 14,000          | 120,000                    |
| Pakistan      | 110,000                          | 3,000         | 10,000+                           | 18,000                 | 10-12,000                    |                      | 20,000          | 50,000                     |
| Sri Lanka     | 150,000                          | 3,000         | 1,000+                            |                        | 1,500                        |                      |                 | 95,000                     |
| Thailand      | 10,000                           | 1,500         | -                                 |                        |                              |                      |                 |                            |
| Philippines   | 50,000                           | 2,200         | 3-10,000                          |                        |                              |                      |                 |                            |
| Egypt         | 1,700,000                        | ?             | ?                                 | -                      | -                            |                      | 5,000           | 40,000                     |
| Yemen         |                                  | 7,000         |                                   |                        |                              |                      | 100,000         | 1,300,000                  |
| Others        | 140,000                          |               |                                   |                        |                              |                      | 13,000          |                            |
| <b>TOTAL:</b> | <b>2,400,000</b>                 | <b>45,000</b> | <b>60-80,000</b>                  | <b>40-50,000</b>       | <b>18,000+</b>               | <b>10-100,000</b>    | <b>190,000+</b> | <b>1,800,000-2,000,000</b> |

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CPM 10/9

PRIME MINISTER

This is a slightly breathless initiative from Mr Waldegrave, but I am sure he is right that a considerable disaster could be in the making.

As with most fund-raising exercises, we end up always approaching the same donors: and I doubt the Saudis or Kuwaitis will see the refugees from Iraq and Kuwait as their responsibility.

*Yes* I think it is right to ask the UN Secretary-General to appoint a single person to take responsibility for organising relief and the airlift: but then we should leave it to him to drum up support and financial contributions. Anything else should wait at least until after Lynda Chalker returns and reports.

Agree?

*CP*

CHARLES POWELL

8 September 1990

*Agreed with*  
Germany  
Sweden  
Switzerland  
Italy

*all the countries that are not doing much now. We can't expect the Saudis & Kuwait to do everything i.e. pass up for weeks for serious danger and refugees.*