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Rt Hon. Des Browne MP
Secretary of State
Ministry of Defence
Whitehall
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cc: Lord Malloch-Brown
FCO Minister for Africa, Asia and the UN

18 December 2007

Dear Secretary of State,

I have previously written on several occasions to ministers in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office about the United Nations Association of the UK's deep concern at the situation in Darfur (my letters of 13 March 2007, 11 September 2006 and 28 April 2006).

As you know, the build-up of the joint African Union/UN peacekeeping force in Darfur, mandated by the Security Council many months ago, has now reached a critical stage. And lack of helicopters for the force is putting at risk the whole venture and the lives of many of the inhabitants of Darfur. I am therefore as Chair of UNA-UK writing to you to ask that the Ministry of Defence do everything in its power to provide some helicopters for the AU/UN force, if necessary on a strictly time-limited basis.

A further setback to the already belated efforts by the international community to protect the inhabitants of Darfur would be disastrous. It would undermine all the efforts to which the British government, among others, has committed itself in order to implement the 'responsibility to protect', endorsed by the UN World Summit in 2005. In the conditions of Darfur, the provision of helicopters is surely critical to the achievement of that objective. It would be indefensible if Britain, a permanent member of the Security Council, were to decline to provide helicopters at a time when there are some available at our disposal. I hope very much you will find your way to taking the necessary decisions to help this peacekeeping operation, which is so urgently needed.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Mark Malloch Brown.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Chair, UNA-UK