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From the Secretary of State

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17 JUL 2008

17 July 2008

Dear Nick -

Thank you for Charlotte Imbert's letter of 12 June, to the Prime Minister urging him to ensure strong EU leadership at the June European Council in the fight against global poverty. As Secretary of State for International Development I have been asked to respond. I apologise for the delay in replying.

As you know, I share your concerns over progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and will continue to urge my European and other international counterparts to work hard on this issue.

I am sure you will join me in welcoming the positive outcomes of the June European Council (JEC), and the production of an EU Agenda for Action on the MDGs. The Agenda for Action demonstrates the EU's efforts to accelerate progress on the MDGs and should encourage others to also act in the run up to the important meetings in the second half of this year in Accra, New York and Doha. A pivotal moment will be the UN high level event on the MDGs in September, where all stakeholders, not just governments, but civil society, the private sector and faith groups among others, must commit to concrete actions to help get the MDGs back on track.

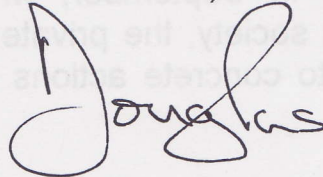
You will be aware that EU Heads of State also strongly reaffirmed EU aid volume commitments at the June European Council, EU aid should increase to over 66 billion euros in 2010. It was agreed that EU member states should establish indicative timetables on how they will scale up their aid to achieve these targets.

The June European Council also agreed that the EU will undertake radical reform to improve aid effectiveness. This will build on the positive outcomes of the May GAERC and be taken forward at the High Level Forum in Accra in September.

As you are aware, the result of the Irish referendum has meant that discussions on the Lisbon Treaty have been put on hold. It is now for the Irish Government to decide how it wants to proceed from here and to discuss this with governments of the rest of the EU Member States. The Irish Government has offered a report on the next stage for Ireland to be presented at the European Council meeting in October. At the June European Council, Brian Cowen recommended that other Member States should continue with their ratification process. The Prime Minister was able to report the Lisbon Treaty has now completed its parliamentary process in the UK. The Bill has received Royal Assent and our process of ratification will be completed soon.

Notwithstanding the ongoing debate across Europe on the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, reform of the EU's aid architecture and improving its value for money, remain priorities for us. In the debates on reform, we will continue to emphasise the need for a strong development voice within the European Commission, an emphasis on long-term development focused on poverty, enhanced coordination and consistency of Commission activities and an emphasis on country-led development.

May I take this opportunity to welcome you into your new role at BOND. We appreciate the continued role of BOND on the EU given the network now represents more than 350 NGOs. The next stage is to ensure that the EU continues to demonstrate strong leadership at the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra and the UN High Level Event on MDGs in New York in September.

Yours ever,


DOUGLAS ALEXANDER