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International
Development

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Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP
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13 August 2009

Dear Tessa,

Thank you for your letter of 30 July to Douglas Alexander, (ref: 01092536) enclosing an example of emails from your constituents about EDM 1553 and UNITAID's proposal to establish a patent pool for HIV medicines. I am replying as the Minister who leads on this issue.

The UK Government has consistently supported the efforts of UNITAID, the international drug purchase facility, to investigate the feasibility of a patent pool as a potential means to provide better access to drugs for HIV/AIDS, and to facilitate the production of fixed dose combinations, particularly those suitable for children. Apart from our considerable long term financial commitment to UNITAID (some £790 million over 20 years), we have supported this work in our position as a Board member and by participating in the Expert Working Group UNITAID has set up to advise on patent pool development.

Although patent pools have been commonly formed in other industries, they have never been tried before in the biomedical field. This will require overcoming various challenges in developing a feasible operating model for the pool. That is why it is important that UNITAID does a thorough technical assessment, and also consults widely to generate imaginative solutions to those challenges. For our part, we have encouraged the pharmaceutical industry to work with UNITAID in developing its plans for a pool.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

MIKE FOSTER
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State