
PRESS STATEMENT

Leigh Day & Co
SOLICITORS



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THE
CORNER
HOUSE

Statement from CAAT and The Corner House
*Read out at press conference at Leigh Day & Co. offices
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On 14 December 2006, we, Campaign Against Arms Trade and The Corner House, learned that the Serious Fraud Office had abandoned its investigation into alleged corruption with regards to BAE Systems' Al Yamamah arms deals with Saudi Arabia.

We immediately sought a judicial review.

Then, as now, we believe that no one should be above the law: not BAE Systems, not Government ministers, not Saudi princes. We believe that might is not right: and that the law should be applied without fear, favour or prejudice.

We were shocked by the UK Government's cynicism in terminating this corruption investigation and its willingness to jettison its international obligations – to protect an arms deal and all those who had had a hand in it.

This was the most extreme example so far of the levels to which the Government will go to promote the wishes of BAE regardless of the public interest.

And we were stunned by the Government's hypocrisy on corruption. The Government tells poor countries they can't get UK aid loans for hospitals, schools and other essentials unless they root out corruption. Whilst in Britain, our prosecutors are quietly taken to one side and pressured into abandoning a corruption investigation that might upset powerful interests at home and abroad. One rule for the rich, another for the poor.

We began proceedings for the judicial review on 18 December 2006. In the 16 months since then, which have culminated in today's judgment, the

Government and BAE have repeatedly tried to block us and to prevent the facts from coming to light:

--BAE spied on Campaign Against Arms Trade and obtained our legal advice.

--The Government refused to make public its response to our claims.

--And just over two weeks ago, it introduced new legislation that, if it had been in place 16 months ago, would effectively have made our judicial review impossible.

Since the Serious Fraud Office's investigation was dropped, we have been overwhelmed by the support we have received from people in all walks of life. Their support and encouragement has been a constant reminder to us of the public importance of this issue. Thousands of individuals made donations to CAAT and The Corner House to make this case possible.

Only with the assistance and persistence of the media in uncovering the facts behind BAE's activities, and the resolute commitment of the courts to the rule of law, have we collectively been able to hold the Government to account and to get where we are today:

- the courts forced BAE to admit to its paid spies, making legal history in the Process;
- in a case brought by campaigner and comedian Mark Thomas and the media, the courts ruled that the Government cannot withhold from the public its responses to judicial reviews; and
- today, the courts ruled that the decision to terminate the Serious Fraud Office investigation was illegal.

All these judgments have strengthened our security and our freedoms, freedoms that were threatened by BAE's actions, Saudi Arabia's actions – and Tony Blair's actions.

In order to protect the rich and powerful and its friends, the Government bowed to extortion.

It was claimed that British lives were at imminent risk on British streets unless this investigation was stopped. The Court held that there was no evidence for this.

What was really at risk was in fact 'the rule of law'.

The 'imminent threat', as Lord Justice Moses and Mr Justice Sullivan stressed in today's judgement, was to justice. And, without justice, we are nothing.

For this reason, the implications of today's judgment go beyond BAE and beyond corruption. They go to the very heart of democracy and to the critical importance of an independent judiciary willing to hold the executive to account and to ensure equality before the law.

But we all still have a long way to go.

In the light of this judgment, the Serious Fraud Office must reopen its investigation into BAE's Saudi arms deals immediately. We call on Gordon Brown's government not to stand in its way; we call on the Government to pull back from its proposed legislation to give the Attorney General new undemocratic powers.

This is not just CAAT and Corner House's case. It belongs to everyone who is concerned to maintain the integrity of the British justice system and the independence of its law enforcement authorities. It belongs to everyone who is troubled by corruption, by the arms trade and by the misuse of national security arguments by the executive.

We appeal to everyone who shares those concerns to join us in ensuring that today's judgment is not overturned in future or rendered toothless by the government's proposed new legislation.

Thank you.