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9 September 2021

Dear John,

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION NON-COMMEMORATION REPORT

Further to the commitment I gave to you during my oral statement on 22 April (Official Report, Column 1164), I am now writing to provide the first update regarding the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) response to the Non-Commemoration Report, which was the subject of my statement. The CWGC's own, comprehensive progress report will be published today, with the Commission's second progress report scheduled for December 2021.

I am pleased to report that the CWGC has already taken steps to begin to put right the historic wrongs highlighted in the Non-Commemoration Report and now has a clear plan to deliver against the ten recommendations contained within it. In particular, a dedicated working group has been established to oversee the necessary programme of activity, new posts have been created in the UK and in Africa, and an initial budget of over £5M has been allocated from within existing resources. Work is being prioritised to search for the names of those not commemorated – 5 890 names have already been discovered from the National Archives, predominantly men from East Africa. The policy by which such individuals will be formally included for commemoration has also been updated to provide greater flexibility in adjudication.

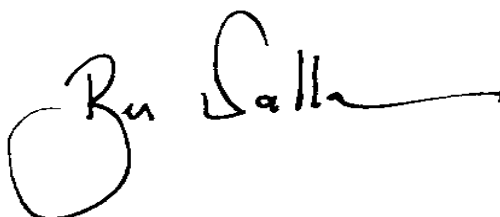
In terms of wider engagement, third-party memorials in Africa have been identified that include names not currently recorded by CWGC and the Commission is progressing the legal steps necessary to partner with local stakeholders to secure their ongoing maintenance and care. These new names will be added to CWGC's global casualty database. Partnerships in Africa, India and the United Kingdom are already delivering on the promise of engaging communities with the culture, heritage, and stories of those not commemorated as well as the wider contribution of those who served.

The Rt Hon John Healey MP
Shadow Defence Secretary
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In short, I believe that the CWGC is now acting at pace on the commitments the Commission made when the Non-Commemoration Report was released. It was made clear at the time that this would be a major, long-term undertaking but initial indications are positive, and the plans being put in place set the conditions for success. Moreover, although the Non-Commemoration Report was of course regrettable in terms of highlighting very significant historic wrongs, the ongoing activity to address the recommendations made does provide an opportunity to reinvigorate the work and relevance of the CWGC, and for the Commission to engage with new communities and new audiences. I will provide a further update in December once the CWGC's second progress report is produced and will maintain a keen interest as work continues in the meantime.

A copy of this letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Wallace". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, circular initial "B" and a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

THE RT HON BEN WALLACE MP