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THE HIGH COMMISSION OF THE
REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

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LONDON WC2N 5DX

OUR REF: UML/10/31

YOUR REF:

July 10, 2002

Mr. Charles de Chassiron
Head of Protocol Division and
Vice-Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps
Old Admiralty Building
London SW1A 2PA

Dear Mr. de Chassiron,

On behalf of my colleagues the Deans representing diplomatic groups of Asia, Arab and Caribbean/Pacific and myself, I wish to thank you for meeting us on June 21, 2002 to discuss the important issue of the congestion charge scheme the Mayor of London wishes to impose on all of us by May 2003.

I also wish to extend our thanks and gratitude to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office for the efforts so far made to try and convince the Mayor to provide exemption to the Diplomatic Corps at the Court of St. James's from paying the congestion charge.

We were particularly obliged to know that two Ministers at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office have on more than one occasion written to the Mayor on behalf of the Diplomatic Corps on the same issue.

Since we are informed that the London Transport Committee is still considering this matter, we hope that collectively we will continue to impress on the London Mayor to appreciate the need for him to look at the Diplomatic Corps at the Court of St. James's as a special group, which needs to be given special concession on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Professor George B. Kirya
High Commissioner for Uganda and
Dean of the Diplomatic Corps

TxB 172/003/2002

26 JUN 2003

Handwritten notes:
15/7.
I don't think a reply is needed
26/7
Very polite - should lack? But what more can I say?
May of the Dip Corps all bear at the Court building.
next week will doubtless lobby further.
Cef
2/

e.c. ~~H.E. Mr. Vidhya Rayananonda~~
~~Royal Thai Ambassador and~~
~~Dean of the Asian Heads of Mission Group~~
~~29-30 Queen's Gate~~
~~London SW7 5BJ~~

H.E. Mr. Aesa Saleh Al-Gurg
Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates and
Dean of the Arab Heads of Mission Group
30 Princes Gate
London SW7 1PT

H.E. Mr. Laleshwar K.N. Singh
High Commissioner for Guyana and
Dean of the Caribbean/Pacific Heads of Mission Group
3 Palace Court
Bayswater Road
London W2 4LP

RECORD OF MEETING ON 21 JUNE 2002 ON CONGESTION CHARGING
BETWEEN MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND PROTOCOL
DIVISION

Present:

Charles de Chassiron, Head Protocol Division
[REDACTED], Head of DMIOU, Protocol Division
[REDACTED], Deputy Head of DMIOU, Protocol Division
[REDACTED], Assistant Legal Adviser
Professor George B Kirya, Uganda High Commissioner (Dean)
[REDACTED], Second Secretary Ugandan High Commission
Laleshwar K N Singh, Guyana High Commissioner
[REDACTED] Minister UAE Embassy

1. Professor Kirya began by complaining about the cost of running a diplomatic mission in London. The cost of living was rising and this affected developing countries in particular. Missions had to reduce staff and activities. The high cost of houses often meant that Heads of Mission had to live outside central London. Diplomats had privileges in other countries such as free airport parking, free use of the VIP lounge and relief from VAT. He and his colleagues wondered why there were no similar privileges in the UK. On congestion charging he had already been in touch with the Greater London Authority (he produced a recent letter from the Chief Executive saying that the Mayor would be considering the corps' proposals for exemption from charges). Why had the FCO not consulted the diplomatic corps about the introduction of these charges?
2. Mr de Chassiron replied that we were sympathetic to the Dean's concerns, and we were pleased that he was in direct dialogue with the Greater London Authority and Transport for London. [REDACTED] He explained that congestion charging was the idea of the GLA, and not of the FCO or of central government. Two FCO ministers, Baroness Amos and Dr MacShane, had written to the Mayor of London, but he had replied recently that there would be no exemptions from the charge. We were about to send a Note to all diplomatic missions explaining why they had to pay the charges (Comment: advance copies were given to Prof Kirya and his colleagues. We had sent an earlier Note in March, together with a map explaining how and where the charges would be levied. The Dean and his colleagues were encouraged to contact Mr Turner, Managing Director of TFL, who had invited members of the diplomatic community to discuss with him the operation of the scheme). Mr de Chassiron also mentioned that Westminster City Council had issued a legal challenge against congestion charging, on the grounds that the Mayor's proposals had not been submitted to a public enquiry and that he had not ordered an environmental assessment of their impact. If this challenge was successful, introduction of the charges, due in 2003, would be delayed.

TXB 172 / 003 / 2002

3. [REDACTED]

4. Mr de Chassiron explained that diplomats were liable to pay charges to use their cars in Singapore, Oslo and Tehran, where similar schemes existed. We all had to realise that there was a chronic transport problem in London and congestion charging was aimed at addressing this problem. We would all benefit from the projected percentage reductions in London traffic flows. His predecessor had been in contact with the airport authorities about use of the VIP lounge, and we had fought hard to keep charges down.

5. [REDACTED]

6. Professor Kirya said it was helpful to know that it had not been our decision to introduce congestion charges. He welcomed the efforts FCO Minister had made. If blanket exemption was not possible, could a number of cars from each mission be exempt from the charges, perhaps in accordance with the number of parking bays? Or could cars used by the Head of Mission and his deputy be exempt? There was a security element which had to be considered. Use of a black cab would be prohibitive.

7. Mr de Chassiron urged the Dean to make these points directly to Mr Turner at TFL. It was encouraging that the letter the Dean had shown him from the Chief Executive of the GLA had stated that the representations made by the diplomatic corps were still being considered. He noted that this letter was dated three weeks after the negative letter we had received from the Mayor. He mentioned that the Spanish and Danish Ambassadors, qua successive EU Presidencies, were calling on him the following week to discuss congestion charging. Mr de Chassiron undertook to review the other questions that had been raised at the meeting, and hoped that the dialogue could continue.

8. Professor Kirya left the attached speaking note.

24 June 2002