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(DESPATCHED)
14.5.84

THE PRIME MINISTER

14 May 1984

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Dear Mr. Owen

Thank you for your letters of 3 and 10 May. I shall send a considered reply to your first letter shortly but thought I should reply to your letter of 10 May at once.

I am grateful to you for drawing this possible risk to Britons in Libya to our attention. Dr Traiki's reported remarks may, as you suggest, represent special pleading, but we must clearly take them very seriously. I have made sure that they are taken fully into account by those concerned.

I have noted carefully what you say about advice to the British community. This is much on our minds but it is not an easy matter, as you yourself say. We have to balance the obvious advantages of getting people out of Libya against the risk that any public advice we give them to leave may cause Qadhafi to react by frustrating their departure and in effect making them public hostages, thus sharply escalating the crisis. This we all naturally wish to avoid. We are also, of course, taking account of the views of the British community themselves and of their employers and are in touch with representatives of the major British firms now operating in Libya. I am sure you

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understand how dangerous and volatile the situation is,
and how important it is not to say or do anything which could
play into Libyan hands and harm rather than help the British
community there.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Thatcher

The Rt Hon Dr David Owen, M.P.

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