

**MURAD QURESHI AM**

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Our ref: MQ / AM

7<sup>th</sup> July 2009

**Dear President Obama**

**US Embassy's non-payment of Congestion Charge in London**

I feel it is only right to bring to your attention a matter which has cast an unnecessary shadow over relations between the US Embassy to Britain and the people of London since 2003, in the hope that you will reverse a mean-spirited decision taken under your predecessor's administration by the former US Ambassador to the UK, not to honour the Embassy's financial obligations to their host city with regard to the cost of driving in central London.

In response to rising pollution levels and near-gridlock levels of congestion in Central London, the previous Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, bravely introduced a radical, controversial and highly successful daily congestion charge for cars entering a specified Central London zone. The Mayor did not seek to bar cars from London, merely to discourage their use in the most congested and most polluted area of the city. This charge was set initially at £5 per vehicle per day and was later increased to £8 in order to maintain its deterrent effect.

Thanks to our good public transport system, many Londoners choose not to own a car, and indeed for many there is simply no need – especially for those whose main journey is a commute from the suburbs into central London.

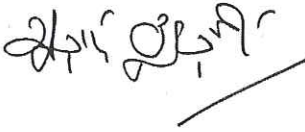
Mr Tuttle steadfastly refused to pay London's congestion charge, wrongly claiming it to be a tax from which foreign diplomats are exempt. Many here feel this was an ignoble attitude from the Ambassador of the wealthiest country on earth, and one which has set an unfortunate tone, and a poor example for other Embassies to follow.

As at 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2009, the US Embassy owes the Mayor's transport department, Transport for London, £3,478,200 in unpaid charges and late payment fines, and is by far the worst offender for non-payment. This sum is considerably higher than the amounts other Embassies of far lower status than the USA owe to Londoners.

I know you are seeking to introduce new era of international relations with your Presidency, one based on decency and mutual respect, and in that spirit I respectfully ask you to advise the new

Ambassador to London of the longer benefits of adopting a more honourable stance with regard to complying with local expectations. Please issue a Presidential decree that the new Ambassador should reverse Mr Tuttle's decision and ensure that the US Embassy in London pays the congestion charge in future, and repays the outstanding charges to make good the errors of the past.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Murad Qureshi', with a horizontal line underneath it.

**Murad Qureshi AM**  
LONDON ASSEMBLY MEMBER