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PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T 107/86

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

9 June 1986

Dear Mr. Gorbachev,

Thank you for your message of 31 May on the lessons to be drawn from the accident at Chernobyl. I appreciate your sharing your thoughts with me: let me say at once that I find much in your message with which I agree.

Peaceful nuclear power offers mankind many advantages. But as we have seen at Chernobyl the accidental release of radioactive material can cause serious and widespread damage. The consequences of a serious nuclear accident are not limited to the territory of the state where it occurred. Radioactive clouds recognise no frontiers. Even in the United Kingdom, over 2,000 kms from Chernobyl, special monitoring was necessary to ensure that there was no danger of unacceptably high levels of radioactivity in foodstuffs. Indeed this still continues on a more limited basis. All countries with nuclear programmes have a responsibility to ensure the highest possible standards of nuclear safety. I agree entirely that all must work together to this end and that international co-operation in the nuclear field must be expanded. The British Government will give its full co-operation to this end.

I am glad that you have been able to endorse the idea of an international convention establishing the obligation to provide information immediately in the event of a nuclear accident with transboundary effects. As you know, this was proposed in the Tokyo Economic Summit Declaration. I am glad that work on this, and on a convention covering the provision of assistance in the event of nuclear accidents, is now going ahead urgently in the IAEA. Our delegation there will co-operate closely with yours to ensure that this vital work is completed as soon as possible.

I agree that the main task is to ensure that there should be no more nuclear accidents. Here again work is in hand in the International Atomic Energy Authority, and I expect that a detailed action programme will be agreed there later this week. I hope that the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union can co-operate closely in this area as well. We attach much importance to the detailed report which your government have promised to provide on the causes, development and consequences of the accident. British experts will of course participate in the discussions of this scheduled for later this year. I read with interest your view that national and, where necessary, international safety standards should be strengthened, that there should be international co-operation to design an especially safe new generation of nuclear reactors and that the issues of standardising admissible radiation levels should be reconsidered. I should appreciate more detailed ideas from you in these fields.

I fully agree that there should be adequate recourse for damage in the case of accidents at nuclear power stations. In this connection may I draw your attention to the existence of the 1960 Paris Convention on Third Party Liability in the Field of Nuclear Energy and the 1964 Brussels Supplementary Convention. The United Kingdom and other Western countries are parties to both Conventions. May I suggest that the Soviet Union should seek to accede to them.

You refer to the dangers of nuclear terrorism. The British Government is fully aware of these dangers and takes all possible precautions. I fully agree that governments everywhere should join forces to combat terrorism of all sorts. You will have seen from the Tokyo Summit Declaration and the measures agreed by the Member States of the European Community in May that we are already making progress in international co-operation against this threat. We shall continue to work for increased co-operation with all like-minded countries. You already know, from your recent discussions with Lord Whitelaw, my view that the Soviet Union should co-operate by reducing the size of diplomatic missions of states which sponsor or support terrorism; take action against the Libyan People's Bureau in Berlin; and should refrain from providing the moral and material support to Libya which enables it to promote terrorism.

You have used the Chernobyl disaster to point up the dangers of military use of nuclear energy and in particular to promote your views on the cessation of nuclear tests. I must say that I do not find your arguments convincing. All responsible statesmen are aware of the catastrophe for mankind that nuclear war would be. We need to seek, through arms control negotiations and political discussions, a safer and more stable world in which this danger can be averted. There are no instant solutions. The Chernobyl disaster does not in itself add force to your argument for one particular measure, an early Comprehensive Test Ban. In my message to you of 27 February and 28 May I gave my views on this issue. I will only add at this stage that even after the events at Chernobyl I continue to believe that the key areas for nuclear arms control are the Nuclear and Space Talks at Geneva.

Like you, I hope that good will come out of Chernobyl. We must use the aftermath to reduce rather than reinforce suspicions and divisions between us. We must work together to ensure that there will be no repetition anywhere in the world of the tragedy which has afflicted your country, so

that mankind may continue to enjoy the benefits of peaceful nuclear power. I pledge that my government will work with yours to this end.

Finally may I express my appreciation and thanks for the reception given by the Soviet Union to the British Parliamentary delegation under the leadership of Lord Whitelaw. Lord Whitelaw reported fully to the Cabinet on the visit. We greeted it as a positive step in British-Soviet relations.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

Mr Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev