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FOLLOWING FOR WICKS, PRIME MINISTER'S PARTY, FROM FLESHER, NO.10

FOLLOWING ARE COMMENTS BY THE CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISER, CABINET OFFICE, ON THE SOVIET NUCLEAR ACCIDENT.

QUOTE. UNTIL WE KNOW MUCH MORE ABOUT THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF THIS ACCIDENT, THE FULL EXTENT OF THE IMPLICATIONS WILL NOT BECOME CLEAR. HOWEVER, THERE ARE ALREADY A NUMBER OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL QUESTIONS WHICH NEED ANSWERING AND THE TOKYO SUMMIT PRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO HARNESS INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION TO ASSIST THIS.

RELEVANCE TO THE TOKYO SUMMIT
THE PLANNING OF NUCLEAR REACTORS INVOLVES THE ESTIMATION OF WORST CASE SCENARIOS AND SUBSEQUENT DESIGN TO REDUCE THE RISKS TO AN ACCEPTABLE LEVEL. THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO TEST EXISTING MODELS OF REACTOR SAFETY, AND OF THE EFFECTS OF A MAJOR ACCIDENT, AGAINST REAL DATA. YOU MAY WISH TO ANNOUNCE AT TOKYO THAT THE UNITED KINGDOM WILL BE UNDERTAKING A STUDY OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT AS A CASE STUDY TO UNDERSTAND BETTER THE LESSONS WHICH NEED TO BE LEARNED AND TO VALIDATE EXISTING SAFETY MODELS. YOU MAY ALSO WISH TO INVITE OTHER SUMMIT STATES TO TAKE PART.

YOU MAY WISH TO PROPOSE THAT THE OPPORTUNITY IS TAKEN AT TOKYO FOR WESTERN LEADERS JOINTLY TO MAKE A PLEA TO THE SOVIET UNION FOR TECHNICAL INFORMATION ON THE ACCIDENT, SO THAT THE WORLD CAN MAKE THE BEST USE OF THIS TO REDUCE THE CHANCE OF SUCH AN INCIDENT EVER HAPPENING AGAIN, IN ANY COUNTRY.

DOMESTIC IMPLICATIONS

THE ACCIDENT RAISES TECHNICAL QUESTIONS RELATING TO OUR EXISTING NUCLEAR REACTORS TO THE PLANNED NUCLEAR PROGRAMME. FURTHERMORE, THERE IS CERTAIN TO BE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE PUBLIC ATTITUDE TO ALL ISSUES OF NUCLEAR POWER, INCLUDING RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT. ALTHOUGH THE HEALTH OF THE POPULATION AND ENVIRONMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM IS UNDER NO IMMEDIATE THREAT, MONITORING IN EAST ANGLIA HAS TODAY PICKED UP INCREASED LEVELS OF RADIOACTIVITY IN THE GRASS AND THERE MAY BE FURTHER FALL-OUT WITH SOME CONTAMINATION OF FOOD CROPS AND WATER SUPPLIES. DEPARTMENTS ARE ADDRESSING THE IMMEDIATE QUESTIONS BUT THERE IS A LOT OF WORK WHICH WILL NEED TO BE DONE ON MEDIUM TO LONG TERM ISSUE. I INTEND TO BE FULLY INVOLVED IN THIS, AND I WOULD WELCOME AN EARLY OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS WITH YOU THE WIDER IMPLICATIONS.

CLEARLY THE GOVERNMENT WILL WANT TO BE ABLE TO REASSURE THE PUBLIC THAT ANY LESSONS FOR THE UK OF THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT HAVE BEEN LEARNED. HOWEVER, I MUST STRONGLY URGE MINISTERS TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO MAKE ANY CATEGORIC STATEMENTS SUCH AS QUOTE A SIMILAR ACCIDENT COULD NOT POSSIBLY HAPPEN IN THE UK UNQUOTE. WE ARE TALKING HERE ABOUT PROBABILITIES AND, HOWEVER REMOTE THE RISK MAY BE, OUR JUDGMENT WILL BE MUCH MORE AUTHORITATIVE IF MADE ONCE WE HAVE OBTAINED AND ASSESSED THE INFORMATION. THE KEY TO DOING THIS EFFECTIVELY WILL BE IN OBTAINING ACCESS TO ALL RELEVANT DATA. UNQUOTE.

MIFT CONTAINS THE TEXT OF LORD MARSHALL'S LETTER ABOUT THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT.

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Passed to PM Party in
Seoul on 2 May 1986
by telegram AR.

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PRIME MINISTER

2 May 1986

THE CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR REACTOR ACCIDENT

Until we know much more about the nature and causes of this accident, the full extent of the implications will not become clear. However, there are already a number of scientific and technical questions which need answering and the Tokyo Summit presents an opportunity to harness international collaboration to assist this.

Relevance to the Tokyo Summit

2. The planning of nuclear reactors involves the estimation of worst case scenarios and subsequent design to reduce the risks to an acceptable level. The Chernobyl accident provides an opportunity to test existing models of reactor safety, and of the effects of a major accident, against real data. You may wish to announce at Tokyo that the United Kingdom will be undertaking a study of the implications of the Chernobyl accident as a case study to understand better the lessons which need to be learned and to validate existing safety models. You may also wish to invite other Summit States to take part.

3. You may wish to propose that the opportunity is taken at Tokyo for Western leaders jointly to make a plea to the Soviet Union for technical information on the accident, so that the world can make the best use of this to reduce the chance of such an incident ever happening again, in any country.

Domestic Implications

4. The accident raises technical questions relating to our existing nuclear

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reactors and to the planned nuclear programme. Furthermore, there is certain to be an adverse effect on the public attitude to all issues of nuclear power, including radioactive waste management. Although the health of the population and environment of the United Kingdom is under no immediate threat monitoring in East Anglia has today picked up increased levels of radioactivity in the grass and there may be further fall-out with some contamination of food crops and water supplies. Departments are addressing the immediate questions but there is a lot of work which will need to be done on medium to long-term issues. I intend to be fully involved in this, and I would welcome an early opportunity to discuss with you the wider implications.

5. Clearly the Government will want to be able to reassure the public that any lessons for the UK of the Chernobyl accident have been learned. However, I must strongly urge Ministers to resist the temptation to make any categorical statements such as "a similar accident could not possibly happen in the UK". We are talking here about probabilities and, however remote the risk may be, our judgment will be much more authoritative if made once we have obtained and assessed the information. The key to doing this effectively will be in obtaining access to all relevant data.

6. I am copying this minute to Sir Robert Armstrong.



PP JOHN FAIRCLOUGH
Chief Scientific Adviser

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