

From: Sir C Tickell

Date: 9 March 1989

ccs: PS
 PS/Mr Waldegrave
 PS/Lord Glenarthur
 PS/Mr Patten
 PS/PUS
 Sir J Fretwell
 Mr Hayne
 Mr Beetham, MAED
 Mr Hemens, Soviet Dept
 Mr Brenton, UND
 Mr Cooper, Planners

HMA Moscow
 Sir C Tickell, UKMis
 New York
 10

Mr Slater

Blind copy: Mr Powell, No 10

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: SOVIET VIEWS

1. In my ^{at 11:00} minute of 7 March I gave an account of my meeting with Mr Ivanov (Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs) on 7 March. It may be useful if I record one or two more details.

2. In paragraph 8 of my minute, I mentioned Mr Ivanov's reference to the idea first expressed by Mr Gorbachev in his speech to the General Assembly in December to create a UN Environmental Disaster Group. Mr Ivanov said that his Government had been prompted into this idea by what had happened - or not happened - over the Chernobyl disaster. The disaster had stunned people on the spot and caused a breakdown of communications. The result had been that the right remedial action, such as it was, had been intolerably delayed. What the Russians had in mind for the future had two aspects

- An Environmental Disaster Group would be set up in New York. It would consist of very few people who would act in a co-ordinating role. In participating countries a wide range of experts would be earmarked to respond to a call if need should arise. In this fashion a disaster, whether short or long term, could be identified at the request of the Government concerned; the office in New York would alert appropriate experts from all over the world; and the experts could fly in, supported by the necessary equipment (and he particularly mentioned communications equipment) as soon as possible thereafter.

- Cost was a paramount consideration in Soviet minds. The Russians had no intention of proposing a new bureaucracy paid for out of UN funds. They thought that the scheme could be financed by participating Governments and of course, depending on the circumstances, by the recipient Government. In this fashion costs

/could

costs could be kept down and an effective mechanism put in place.

3. I remarked that a scheme of this kind was not totally unlike the ODA Disaster Unit which, in my experience as Permanent Secretary of the ODA, worked extremely well. It was interesting that the Soviet Union should be proposing an international disaster unit. Problems of state secrecy, particularly in the communications field, had been an impediment to ideas of this kind getting very far in the past. Mr Ivanov acknowledged this point; but, he said, things had greatly changed, and the operations of a UN Environmental Disaster Group could be the catalyst for yet more change.

4. As I said in paragraph 8 of my minute of 7 March, Mr Ivanov said that Mr Gorbachev would certainly wish to raise environmental matters when he visited Britain next month; in addition he would probably raise this point. So we need to clear our own minds on the idea.



Sir C Tickell

ENJO AFFAIRS
A.C. Rai 198

