

Nuclear Information Service

Ibex House 85 Southampton Street
Reading RG1 2QU United Kingdom

tel/fax: +44 (0)118 327 7489 e-mail: office@nuclearinfo.org www.nuclearinfo.org

Sara Thornton
Chief Constable
Thames Valley Police
Oxford Road
Kidlington
Oxfordshire
OX5 2NX

15 July 2011

Dear Chief Constable,

I am writing to you to enquire about the presence of police officers at a screening of the film 'Countdown to Zero' which was hosted by Nuclear Information Service (NIS) at the RISC Centre in Reading on Sunday 10 July 2011.

'Countdown to Zero' is a documentary film about the risks posed by nuclear weapons and features opinions from a number of global leaders such as Tony Blair, Mikhail Gorbachev, and former US Secretary of State James Baker. NIS organised the screening in Reading as one of a UK-wide series of presentations of the film in our role of educating and informing the public on issues relating to nuclear weapons. The event was attended by the Mayor of Reading who was present as our guest of honour in order to introduce the film.

I was very surprised to learn from guests attending the event that people entering the RISC centre were being monitored by two officers from Thames Valley Police who were loitering opposite the building and writing notes about everyone who entered. I believe that they were also filming individuals entering the building from cameras mounted on their tunics, and I have also been informed that they were writing down the registration numbers of vehicles parked in the RISC Centre car park.

As organiser of the event, I received a number of complaints about this conduct from guests arriving at the event, and I went out to ask the two officers what they were doing. I spoke to police officer WILKINS (6193) and HOUSE who informed me that they had been sent there to "watch out for certain people". When I asked them to explain what they meant by this and what they hoped to achieve they were unable to provide any further justification for their presence. I told them that I thought they should not be spying on people attending an event which in no way infringed the law and asked them to leave, although they did not do so.

The film 'Countdown for Zero' is a mainstream documentary film which was attended at its UK première by the former Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett as a guest of honour. Nuclear Information Service is an information and education organisation,

not a campaign organisation, and the event was not a protest event or linked in any way to a protest event. I consider it entirely inappropriate for police officers to be spying on an event of this nature.

I am therefore writing to complain to you about the conduct of the police on this occasion, and in particular about the conduct of the senior police officer who ordered officers to monitor the event. I feel that Thames Valley Police owe an apology to those who attended the event, and in particular the Mayor of Reading, for spoiling an event which in every way was within the law and the bounds of respectability.

I should be grateful if you would investigate this matter and advise me why the two police officers were present, for what reasons Thames Valley Police wished to spy on our event, and why Thames Valley Police officers considered that watching films such as 'Countdown to Zero' is a suspicious activity.

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Burt
Nuclear Information Service