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MINISTER OF STATE FOR
THE ARMED FORCES

D/Min(AF)/JR/4096/97/M

29th October 1997

Dear Alex

Thank you for your letter of 13 October to George Robertson concerning Exercise **SHORT SERMON**. I am replying as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

I should say first that there has never been an accident involving a nuclear powered submarine reactor which has led to, or come anywhere near leading to, any release of radioactive contamination to the environment. We are confident that the continued application of stringent safety procedures will continue to prove effective in preventing any such accident.

Nevertheless, we would consider it irresponsible not to have comprehensive contingency plans for dealing with all aspects of such an eventuality, and we test these plans in regular exercises at various levels including full scale events such as Exercise **SHORT SERMON 97**. An overview of these arrangements was given in the Statement on Defence Estimates 1995.

Plans for responding to defence nuclear accidents are derived in full consultation with all relevant government departments, agencies, and in particular with the emergency services and local authorities in the area concerned. The joint plan for responding to a submarine reactor accident at Faslane is a publicly available document. Furthermore, the public in the immediate area, who might be advised to take action, are sent leaflets under the provisions of the Public Information for Radiological Emergencies Regulations.

Alex Salmond Esq MP



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Exercise **SHORT SERMON**, which will be held in the Faslane area between 18 to 20 November 1997, is being designed to test the response of the MoD and Royal Navy in dealing with an accident involving the reactor of a nuclear powered submarine berthed in Clyde Naval Base. A key aspect of the exercise will be coordination of activities between the MoD and other agencies. We have been most pleased by the comprehensive support for the exercise that has been provided by all local emergency services and authorities and by the Scottish Office and other government departments.

The accident scenario will be simulated and no radioactive contaminants will be used during the exercise. There will be an evacuation of the Naval Base in accordance with the plan, but I would like to reassure you that the local community will not be affected in any way by the exercise.

I hope this explains the position.

Kind Regards

John

DR JOHN REID MP

