

Secretary of State for Defence  
Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Hoon MP

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7 November 2000

Your Ref:  
Our Ref: PS/DAP/SCND

Dear Sir

## HMS Triumph

We are instructed by the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Our client is concerned about the decision announced in the House of Commons on 1 November 2000 to return HMS Triumph to operational duties.

You will be fully aware of the background to our client's concerns. The UK Government decided to recall all of the hunter killer submarine fleet in the light of the problems experienced by HMS Tireless in Gibraltar. It would appear that the nuclear reactor in HMS Tireless has shown a serious fault with newspapers in the UK reporting that the reactor was hours away from melt down. Information given by the UK Government to the Spanish Nuclear Safety Organisation (CSN) led to the latter's report made public in Spain on 30 October noting "The existence of the same kind of problem in other units confirms the hypothesis of a generic problem of this class of reactor.....".

We note that HMS Superb, HMS Splendid, HMS Trafalgar, HMS Turbulent, HMS Torbay and HMS Talent all show "signs of flaw" according to the notes for editors on a press release issued on 1 November 2000 by the MoD. This information tends to confirm that there might well be a generic problem with the nuclear reactor in this type of submarine. The public in the UK are rightly concerned, particularly those members of the public living close to dockyards where these inspections and repair works are to be carried out: Devonport, Faslane and Rosyth.

It would appear that HMS Triumph sailed into Devonport on 27 October. On 1 November the Government announced in the House of Commons that HMS Triumph "will return to operational duties... HMS Triumph's availability means that we are much better placed to conduct operations, including those in support of the deterrent". Our client's concerns centre on the speed in which the decision to return Triumph was made and the lack of transparency. Further our client is concerned that it would not have been possible to carry out a full and detailed inspection unless the nuclear reactor on Triumph had been shut down and radiation levels given time to reduce. It would appear from the timescale that there would not have been sufficient time for the nuclear reactor to have

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been shut down, radiation levels reduced and a full and proper inspection completed before the announcement was made on 1 November.

It is a matter of public record that HMS Tireless has experienced a serious problem thus leading the UK Government to recall the rest of the fleet. It is also clear that this type of problem has the potential to interfere with the human rights of both the sailors on board any of the hunter killer submarines involved, or local residents living close to dockyards where these inspections and repairs are being carried out. The potential interference remains until such time as each submarine has been properly inspected and either cleared or repaired. Further, that process of inspection and clearance/repair should lead to sufficient information being placed in the public domain for the public to be reassured that there are no risks (rather than simply having to accept the assurances of the MoD to that effect).

In the light of the above, our client asks that the MoD confirm in writing within three working days that it will comply with the following:

1. To be transparent in the process of inspection and subsequent clearance/repair depending on whether a flaw has been identified. We submit that there should be a presumption in favour of disclosure in order that as much information as possible be put in the public domain. It is our client's position that the public should be able to assure themselves from their own enquiries that there is no risk. We accept that there may be a need to censor some of the material in order not to put the security of the State at risk. However, we think it right that in general as much environmental information be made available to the public as possible.
2. That HMS Triumph not be returned to operational duties until written reports on its inspection and that of HMS Tireless (after the repairs have been completed) have been made available to both the Government and the public, and an assurance given in the light of the written report on HMS Tireless that there are no risks for the public particularly local residents living close to the dockyards.

We look forward to receiving your written assurances as requested.

Yours faithfully



**Public Interest Lawyers**