



Letter to Ms. Margaret Laurence on Question of Possible Tritium Exports from Canada

On June 19, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs, released the following text of a letter to Ms. Margaret Laurence.

"Dear Ms. Laurence,

I have read your open letter concerning possible tritium exports from Canada and believe that a number of the misleading allegations therein should be refuted. In my view allegations of that nature do not contribute to the informed and comprehensive discussions desirable on matters of government policy and merely serve to confuse and mislead those exposed to them.

First, you make sweeping statements about past and current nuclear cooperation by Canada without making any effort to point out that Canadian Government policy and activities in this field have evolved significantly, not least of all in response to India's misuse of Canadian nuclear technology in 1974. Thus Canadian nuclear cooperation now only takes place within the framework of a comprehensive non-proliferation policy which requires, as a condition for nuclear cooperation with Canada, that all non-nuclear-weapon states must make a binding international commitment to non-proliferation, either by adhering to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) or by taking an equivalent step, and must accept International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards on all their peaceful nuclear activities, current and future. In addition all of Canada's nuclear partners, whether non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear-weapon states, must conclude with Canada a nuclear cooperation agreement specific to clearly identified Canadian material, nuclear material, equipment, and technology and incorporating a number of non-proliferation and safeguards provisions. The Canadian Government has learned from its experiences in the field of nuclear cooperation and now has one of the

most stringent policies of all nuclear suppliers. Pursuant to that policy cooperation with India, Pakistan and Taiwan was terminated ten years ago and cooperation with Argentina has been limited to supporting the safe and efficient operation of the Embalse reactor. Canadian cooperation with Romania and South Korea takes place in full accord with the policy outlined above. As this information is widely known, I believe your letter to be deliberately misleading in this regard.

Secondly, Canadian Government officials have responded to numerous enquiries over the past few years, including enquiries from Energy Probe, concerning possible tritium exports from Canada. There has never been any effort by the Government, or by Ontario Hydro in our experience, to deny or avoid any reference to this potential activity. To the contrary, officials have consistently advised that any such exports would take place only within the general framework of Canada's non-proliferation policy as regards nuclear exports. In that context it should be noted that tritium is not identified as a nuclear material in the Statute of the IAEA, and is not subject to IAEA safeguards. The Canadian Government believes that, given the physical nature of tritium and its limited proliferation significance, the application of safeguards to tritium is not appropriate. It should be clear, however, that export licences and permits for tritium will not be issued unless the Government is satisfied that tritium will not be used for nuclear weapon or any other nuclear explosive purposes. Moreover, officials indicated that detailed guidelines covering the evaluation of export applications were being developed for Ministerial consideration. Those guidelines were announced publicly by the Atomic Energy Control Board on March 14, 1986, well in advance of any request by Ontario Hydro to export tritium. The allegations, implicit and explicit, in this context in your letter are thus also unfounded.

Finally, and most importantly, you state in your letter that 'the prime beneficiary of our (tritium) exports is expected to be the US military' and moreover that 'there's nothing to stop the USSR, other nuclear weapons states, and even terrorists from ultimately getting their hands on it.' There is no basis for this statement. As I have already indicated no export licences or permits for tritium will be issued unless the Canadian Government is satisfied that the material will not be used for nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive purposes. The March 1986 guidelines issued by the AECB clearly support this. Moreover it is my understanding that, contrary to your assertion, the USA military are not called upon by law to fill commercial orders for tritium; in fact, tritium is made available to the USA military by the Department of Energy, which also fills commercial requirements. We have been assured by USA officials that their Oak Ridge facility, which manufactures tritium, has ample supplies for all requirements. Once again I find your letter erroneous and misleading.

Your persistent connection of Canadian tritium to weapons is not only incorrect, but misleading. Commercial, medical and research applications of tritium contribute to the safety, health and well-being of both individuals and general populations. Tritium facilitates such safety-related products as instrument dials, exit signs and emergency markers for commercial aircraft and air ambulance guidance. The benefits to modern medicine of radioisotopes in general are well known and the support of fusion research will assist the development of a new energy source which will be of benefit to all mankind.

Ontario Hydro is the subject of a number of statements in your letter with regard to which it is, I believe, best placed to respond. I can assure you, however, that my officials have found Ontario Hydro representatives to be well-informed, open, and cooperative in responding to their enquiries as regards Ontario Hydro's tritium-related activities.

In conclusion, I believe the Canadian Government has responded in a timely