

8.

The Committee recommends that the Government reject the idea of burning MOX fuel in Canada because this option is totally unfeasible, but that it continue to work with other governments to address the problem of surplus fissile material.

Response

The Government does not endorse this recommendation. The SCFAIT report calls for Canada to "work consistently to reduce the political legitimacy and value of nuclear weapons in order to contribute to the goal of their progressive reduction and eventual elimination". As the CANDU MOX option is viewed internationally as a feasible option and could make a valuable contribution to the disposition of weapons plutonium, thereby promoting continued dismantling of nuclear weapons, the Canadian Government's agreement in principle to consider a CANDU MOX option reflects a responsible Canadian position to meet the goals stated by the SCFAIT report.

The Government does not consider there are sufficient grounds to justify abandoning the possibility of using MOX fuel in Canadian reactors as a means to reduce proliferation risks from weapons plutonium being declared surplus to defence needs in the U.S. and Russia.

Any use of such MOX fuel in Canadian reactors would require appropriate availability of end-use facilities and would be subject to all requirements of federal and provincial legislation and regulations, including the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, the *Transport of Dangerous Goods Act* and the *Atomic Energy Control Act*. The technical feasibility of both the fabrication of CANDU fuel bundles made from a mixed oxide (MOX) fuel, approximately 3% weapons plutonium oxide mixed with depleted uranium oxide, and of their use in Canadian reactors has been studied jointly by Canadian, American and Russian experts. There are no technical, health or safety problems foreseen with this concept, based on the extensive domestic and international expertise with the technologies involved and the 20 years of Western European practical experience with MOX fuel using reactor grade plutonium, produced by reprocessing spent fuel from civilian reactors.

The Government agrees that Canada should continue to work with other governments to address the problem of surplus fissile material. In fact, Canada has encouraged a strong multilateral approach to determine the most expeditious and economic arrangements to deal with this issue. It is anticipated that the U.S. and Russia, along with the G7 and other countries, will establish in the near future an integrated program to expedite early resolution of this matter.

A Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) that would put an end for all time to the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons is another important international objective that Canada supports as a means of preventing further accumulation of fissile material while steps are taken to address the issue of excess fissile material in current stockpiles.