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I understand that you have obtained copies of permits issued for the export of a range of military goods to Chile, the Republic of Korea, Paraguay, the Philippines and Taiwan during the period from January 1, 1984 to May 21, 1985, and that you have raised some questions outside the House of Commons concerning the Government's policy on military exports. I share your view concerning the importance of that issue and the need to ensure that our export controls practice is consistent with the basic principles of Canada's foreign policy.

As you may be aware, Canada maintains one of the most restrictive policies of any Western nation concerning exports of military goods. In order to prevent the escalation of regional disputes, the Government does not issue permits for the export of military goods to countries that are engaged in or under imminent threat of hostilities. Permits would therefore not be issued in the present circumstances for the export of such goods to destinations such as Guatemala, Honduras or Nicaragua.

When permit applications for military exports to countries with poor human rights records are being reviewed, the principal issue is whether there is a risk that the goods will be used against the civilian population. The permits of which you have copies were issued following an interdepartmental review in which it was determined that there was not a significant risk that the goods would be used against civilians.

Permit applications that are not in accord with the principles described above are not approved. In the last six months, I have exercised my authority as Secretary of State for External Affairs to refuse the issuance of permits for military exports to destinations including Chile, Guatemala and Iran.

Because I place such importance on the policy concerning military exports and on the need for Ministers to play a full and appropriate role in the monitoring process, I instructed my officials some time ago to begin the preparation for a thorough review of the policy by Cabinet. This review is intended to ensure that the policy on military exports is in keeping with the fundamental principles of Canada's foreign policy, including human rights.

In light of the fact that you raised this subject in the House, I am taking the liberty of releasing my reply publicly.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Clark"