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SEPTEMBER 14, 1973

GREENPEACE III (1973)

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, made the following statement today about the incident concerning the vessel "Greenpeace III".

"This would seem an appropriate time to make clear the views of the Department of External Affairs with regard to the boarding of 'Greenpeace III' on August 15 and the subsequent injury caused to its skipper, David McTaggart.

As Secretary of State for External Affairs, I consider that Mr. McTaggart is a private Canadian citizen with a legitimate grievance against the French Government, one who is at a distinct disadvantage because he cannot effectively pursue his claim without the Canadian Government providing, as at present, full moral and diplomatic support to this end.

As soon as the Canadian Government learned about this incident, we informed the French authorities not only that we considered that the creation of zones of security, for the purpose of nuclear tests, was an abuse of the freedom of the high seas, but also that we regarded the actions of the French seamen in boarding the ship in international waters, subduing the crew and removing it by force, as being a clear violation of international law.

We also made arrangements to facilitate the visit to Papeete of an ophthalmologist representing Mr. McTaggart's family and we despatched a special consular officer from Ottawa to be of help in Mr. McTaggart's own repatriation. He returned to Vancouver with Mr. McTaggart and the doctor on August 29th.

The French Ambassador was called in on two occasions, on the second of which I handed over to him a formal diplomatic note. We have asked that a full investigation take place to establish the true facts of the case and we are continuing to seek further information both from the French Government and from the 'Greenpeace' crew members to this end.

We fully support and endorse Mr. McTaggart's claim. If the information which we are in the process of collecting from the 'Greenpeace' crew, together with that which we expect to receive in due course from the French authorities should, in our opinion, justify formal espousal of his claim, which would thus be raised to the Government-to-Government level, the Canadian Government would be quite prepared to do this. I believe, however, that until we have received all the depositions from the crew and until the French authorities have had an opportunity to respond to our formal request for an investigation, this would be premature."