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LETTER FROM MR. M. GORBACHEV, GENERAL SECRETARY OF
THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY
OF THE SOVIET UNION, TO DR. H. BLIX,
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE AGENCY

The attached letter is being circulated by the Director General
for the information of Member States.

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TEXT OF A LETTER FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE CENTRAL
COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION
TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE AGENCY

In my television speech on 14 May I discussed the main conclusions which we believe must be drawn from the Chernobyl' accident. Today I should like to share with you some further thoughts on this subject.

It is quite clear that, on a practical level, we must, without delay, embark on the establishment of an international regime of safe nuclear power development. Such a regime would be aimed at reducing to an absolute minimum the possibility of peaceful atoms causing harm to people. Ensuring reliable and safe nuclear power development must become a universal international obligation of all States severally and collectively.

First steps in this direction - some involving the IAEA - have already been taken. Various States are putting forward suggestions and proposals which we are studying carefully.

I should like to stress right away that we do not claim to have ready solutions. World-wide, a total of 152 nuclear power plant emergencies involving the release of radioactivity have occurred so far. Thus, a number of States already have experience in this field on the basis of which we can and must develop an international nuclear safety regime.

Of course, the first thing that is required is a system of operational notification in the case of accidents and malfunctions at nuclear power plants when they are accompanied by the release of radioactivity. A question which is related to such a notification system is that of obtaining data on possible fluctuations in natural background radioactivity levels.

Many States do not have the means and resources to deal with an emergency on their own. That is why we think an important component of an international regime of safe nuclear power development must be a well-designed international mechanism for the swift provision of mutual assistance when

dangerous situations arise. Such a mechanism might also involve the IAEA and the World Health Organization (WHO). States on whose territory an accident has occurred should be assisted by other States in the elimination of the accident consequences if they request such assistance.

Another question which must be considered is that of the form in international law which an agreement relating to a notification system and assistance mechanism might take. One idea is that the obligations of States in this respect could be laid down in a special international convention or conventions. The Soviet side is now considering all these questions and preparing proposals on this matter, taking into account the suggestions of other States.

Several States which agree with this solution to the problem have proposed that even before such a convention is concluded, in June this year, a decision should be taken to establish as soon as possible, within the framework of the IAEA, a system of notification in the event of nuclear accidents. Well, why not, the sooner we can take the appropriate measures, even if they are only preliminary and provisional, the better.

At the same time, the main task, in our view, is to take precautions to prevent an accident from happening. This purpose would be served if information on the causes of the accident could be provided to the IAEA within the tightest possible time limits. Such information would be studied by the appropriate experts with a view to helping IAEA Member States to benefit from the experience gained so as to increase further the safety of nuclear power.

It will be necessary, however, to go further - to elaborate within the IAEA recommendations on nuclear power plant safety questions and to strengthen national and, where appropriate, international verification of compliance with them in all States. It might also be possible to organize, under the auspices of the IAEA, some form of co-operation between the leading countries in nuclear power on the development of a new generation of economic and reliable reactors with enhanced operational safety as compared with existing reactors.

It should also be borne in mind that sufficient attention has not been given at the international level to the question of material, moral and psychological damage in the event of accidents at nuclear power plants and

other nuclear installations. We believe that this matter should be set to rights and that attempts at using nuclear accidents to heighten tension and mistrust in relations between States should be prevented.

I consider, moreover, that the problem of standardizing the permissible levels of radiation in force in the various countries deserves attention in many respects.

Nor should we neglect such aspects of nuclear security as the prevention of nuclear terrorism. The fact that damage has intentionally been caused to installations of the nuclear industry in the West must of necessity give rise to concern. For example, between 1974 and 1984 thirty-two such cases were recorded in the United States. Between 1966 and 1977, ten attacks were carried out against different nuclear installations in Europe. The insufficiency of measures to prevent the misappropriation of highly enriched fissionable material is also attracting attention. This is not by any means an exhaustive list of the opportunities open to terrorists. In the light of all this, it has become apparent that there is a need to develop a reliable system of measures to prevent nuclear terrorism in all its manifestations.

In order to set up an international regime of safe nuclear power development, use could be made of what is already available for the purpose in the framework of various international organizations, such as the IAEA, the World Health Organization, UNEP, the World Meteorological Organization and also the United Nations. All these aspects need to be placed on a firm foundation of broad international co-operation.

Clearly, the chief link in such a system will be the IAEA. The role and capabilities of the Agency should therefore be expanded. For this, an increase in its financial and material resources will obviously be necessary. The problem could be solved, for example, by the assignment to special purposes of mandatory contributions from interested Agency Member States. Consideration should also be given to the establishment within the IAEA of a special fund for the provision of emergency assistance to countries requiring it in the event of a nuclear accident.

I have already stated on 14 May that, in order for this whole group of questions to be discussed, a high-level special international conference should be held in Vienna under the auspices of the IAEA.

I should now like to inform you of the practical measures which we intend to take to improve the work of the USSR State Committee on the Monitoring of the Safe Operation of Nuclear Power, which was set up a few years ago. We intend to intensify its links with the relevant international organizations and also with the corresponding national bodies with a view to exchanging experience on the monitoring of safe nuclear power development.

I should also like to say that we are carrying out a comprehensive analysis of the state of nuclear power and that additional measures to enhance the safety of nuclear power plant operation are being developed and will be implemented, with account being taken of the conclusions derived from the accident at the Chernobyl' nuclear power plant.

Let me emphasize once again that the lessons to be learned from this accident should serve mankind as a whole. What happened at Chernobyl' has been an ominous reminder of the awesome forces that the energy of the atom can command. If an accident at a peaceful nuclear power plant can turn into a disaster we need only imagine the tragic consequences for the whole of mankind that would attend the use of nuclear weapons - existing, as they do, specifically for purposes of destruction and annihilation.

The space age, the nuclear era, required fresh political reflection and new policies on the part of the leaders of all countries of the world. These very demanding objectives are being met by the programme which we have put forward for the total abolition of nuclear weapons and for the establishment of a comprehensive system of international safety and security.

From the moment at which nuclear weapons first arrived on the scene, the best minds have been pondering how to drive the nuclear demon back. Meanwhile, however, the nuclear arms race has become more intensive. So where is the key, the missing link with which the nuclear problem can be solved? A first practical step towards nuclear disarmament could be the cessation of nuclear tests. We attach particular importance to this measure because, at the same time as being highly effective, it is simple to carry out in practice. All that is required is that nuclear tests should not be conducted - subject to verification, of course. Such a measure must finally become a reality of international life.

Having extended its unilateral moratorium on nuclear explosions, the Soviet Union has refrained from carrying them out for the best part of a year. We believe that this long period of time should be more than enough to the Americans to weigh up all aspects of the matter and to meet us half-way so that nuclear testing can be stopped on a bilateral basis.

In view of the urgency of putting an end to nuclear tests, I have again confirmed my proposal to President Reagan that we should meet without delay and agree to ban nuclear tests.

Both these tasks - ensuring the safety of the peaceful use of atomic energy and freeing our planet of nuclear weapons - require broad international co-operation and the united efforts of all States, in particular the nuclear States, international organizations and elements of society which are interested in establishing a comprehensive and reliable international system of safety and security. This is a task for all States collectively and individually. We call upon you to make your contribution to this important cause on which the future of human civilization depends.