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## **GREENPEACE CONDEMNS FRANCE, UK AND JAPAN AS NUCLEAR WASTE SHIPMENT HEADS FOR SOUTH AMERICA**

20 December 2000

Cherbourg, France - Greenpeace condemned the British, French and Japanese governments for endangering South American and Pacific nations as the largest ever nuclear waste shipment left the French port of Cherbourg last night bound for Japan via Cape Horn.

"This shipment is dangerous wherever it goes but particularly so around Cape Horn, an area known for severe weather, treacherous currents and icebergs," said Shaun Burnie of Greenpeace International.

"This is an irresponsible decision which demonstrates the disregard by Japan, France and UK for safety at sea and the environment as well as the health of millions of people in South America and the Pacific," said Burnie.

The Cape Horn, South American, route has been used only once before in 1995 for the first transport of high level nuclear waste from France to Japan. There was strong opposition throughout Latin America to this shipment including the deployment of an armed Chilean warship which ordered the ship out of Chilean waters.

Greenpeace believes the strong opposition of Caribbean small island nations and Central American countries, including Panama, has influenced the decision to take the Cape Horn route instead of using the Panama Canal. The last two high level waste shipments, 1998 and 1999, from France to Japan have gone via the Panama Canal.

Under tight security the nuclear waste shipment left the port of Cherbourg at 8 pm last night onboard the British-flagged freighter "Pacific Swan". A total of 192 blocks of nuclear waste, contained in eight transport containers were loaded on the ship, owned by Pacific Nuclear Transport Limited (PNTL). (British Nuclear Fuels Ltd is a shareholder in PNTL)

The waste is a by-product of plutonium separation from Japanese irradiated nuclear fuel at the French state-controlled COGEMA La Hague reprocessing plant. This waste is among the most radioactive material ever produced - the glass blocks are in fact so radioactive that a person standing within one metre of an unshielded block would receive a lethal dose of radiation in less than one minute. If released into the environment, the waste would be a deadly environmental pollutant for hundreds of thousands of years.

The nuclear waste shipment is ultimately bound for the Japanese port of Mutsu Ogawara. The nuclear waste will then be transported to the controversial nuclear waste storage facility at the Rokkasho Mura nuclear site where Japan is building its own plutonium reprocessing facility.

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