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GREENPEACE ACTIVISTS ARRESTED IN SEA-BASED PROTEST AGAINST LOADING OF JAPANESE PLUTONIUM FUEL

19 January 2001

Cherbourg, France - Six Greenpeace France activists were arrested earlier today when they entered the heavily protected secure zone around the nuclear transport freighter Pacific Pintail, in the port Cherbourg on the Normandy coast.

The British flagged ship which arrived at 06.00 (CET) is currently being loaded with deadly plutonium/MOX fuel, in readiness for a 30,000km voyage to Japan later today.

At around 9.30 am (CET), activists in Greenpeace inflatables and canoes carrying radiation symbols and a "Stop Plutonium" banner evaded armed security to protest alongside the vessel. Swimmers carrying radiation symbol flags jumped from the inflatables and approached the ship. The ship and plutonium cargo were being protected by around 30 French armed marine commandos in 5 boats inside the security zone. A further 50 marine commandos were on the dockside.

The swimmers and canoeists were all arrested by the commandos after protesting for half an hour, but the inflatables evaded security, despite being chased by sea borne French forces.

"The plutonium industry is out of control. Neither Japan nor France receive any benefit from this deadly trade, but both governments and the nuclear industry are threatening the environment and health of millions of people living in coastal communities along the entire 30,000km route by allowing this transport to go ahead. It's time this madness was stopped." said Yannick Rousselet of Greenpeace in Cherbourg.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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Briefings on the plutonium MOX issue are available at www.greenpeace.org/~nuclear/transport/mox00/

Video and stills are available from: Footage +31 20 52 49 543 and stills +31 20 52 49 580.

Notes to editors:

The Pacific Pintail is being loaded with four nuclear casks containing 28 assemblies of plutonium/MOX fuel. The MOX fuel contains approximately 230kg of plutonium. The International Atomic Energy Agency classifies such plutonium/MOX as Category 1 nuclear material, as it can be used directly to make nuclear weapons. Sufficient plutonium for over 20 nuclear weapons is contained in this the second Japanese MOX shipment.