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Group to probe terror threat to Sellafield

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online.ie 04 Dec 2001

A team of Irish and British parliamentarians is to make an investigative trip to the Sellafield nuclear waste reprocessing plant earlier next year to assess security at the controversial plant.

Print version

The move was agreed today in Bournemouth, near the end of a two-day meeting there of the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body.

The group, formed of members of the Dublin and London parliaments, as well as representatives from the Scottish and Welsh assemblies and the administrations in the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, staged a debate on Sellafield.

It came 24 hours after judges at the International Law of the Sea tribunal in Hamburg rejected a Government bid to halt this month's recommissioning of a mixed-oxide (MOX) facility at the controversial Cumbrian location.

A detailed report on the debate is to be submitted to all of the parliaments involved in the BIIB, and the scheduled January visit to Sellafield will be made by the body's environmental committee.

Committee member Conor Lenihan said the priority for the trip would be to investigate security and assess the possibility of a terrorist-style attack similar to September 11.

"There are health and safety issues at Sellafield that need to be addressed," he said.

"There is a genuine fear among members of our body about the prospects of some form of attack.'

Conference criticism of the Sellafield concept was spearheaded by Seamus Kirk, a Fianna Fail member of the Dail, whose Co Louth constituency lies directly across the Irish Sea from Cumbria.

He was strongly backed by Plaid Cymru North Wales MP Elfyn Llwyd, who said Ireland's attempts to prevent the MOX facility and bring about Sellafield's total closure was "a stand on behalf of all the people of the British Isles."

But Labour peer Lord Dubs, a former Northern Ireland Office minister, whose home is in Cumbria, urged caution over the nuclear threat, telling delegates "My understanding is that emissions that might come as a result of the MOX plant are equivalent in radiation effect to one second in a aeroplane.

"If that is accurate, then it puts it into perspective."

The Sellafield issue exposed major differences between the Dublin and London governments at a prime ministerial summit in Dublin last Friday.

Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair agreed to differ on the issue when it came up for discussion in bi-lateral talks during a meeting of the British-Irish Council, one of the key bodies to emerge from the 1998 Good Friday agreement on Northern Ireland.

The Government, however, have pledged to continue their fight to force the closure of Sellafield, and halt the scheduled recommissioning of the MOX plant.

Last month, the Government asked the Hamburg tribunal to order immediate suspension of the British decision pending conclusion of the arbitration.

But, refusing an injunction to stop MOX ahead of a full hearing of the case next year, the tribunal yesterday declared "the urgency of the situation did not require the prescription of the provisional measures as requested by Ireland."

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