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May 8, 2009

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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The Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington, D.C.

**FALEOMAVAEGA CONDEMNS SHIPMENT OF NUCLEAR
WASTE FROM FRANCE TO JAPAN**

Congressman Faleomavaega, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, gave a special order speech regarding a resolution he introduced with Rep Christopher Smith (R-NJ) condemning the shipment of certain nuclear waste through international waters.

“Last month two British-flagged vessels left France with 1.8 tons of plutonium bound for Japan. They are scheduled to arrive in port at some point this month. From what has been made public, the shipment is to travel via the Cape of Good Hope, the southern Indian Ocean, the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand and the south-west Pacific Ocean,” Chairman Faleomavaega said.

The plutonium is contained within what is called “MOX fuel.” The MOX is reprocessed in France and used by the Japanese to produce electricity in their nuclear power plants. The transport of MOX, particularly over international waters, is a dangerous practice.

“MOX is lethal. The release of even a small amount of it during transport over thousands of miles of open sea, whether as a result of accident or malicious intent, would cause serious environmental, health and economic harm to surrounding areas. That much has always been clear,” Chairman Faleomavaega said.

According to reputable estimates, the plutonium currently heading toward Japan could be reprocessed into more than 200 nuclear bombs. And terrorists have long sought the material to build such weapons.

“Al-Qaeda and its networks would like nothing better than to get their hands on enough fissile material to build a nuclear explosive device or radiological bomb, however crude, and to detonate it where it can do most harm. We and our allies around the world have committed our best intelligence, military and civilian officials to work around the clock to eliminate the possibility of that ever happening. And yet, by permitting the transport of MOX over open seas, obviously we are providing terrorists one more avenue of attack for gaining access to the nuclear materials they have so long coveted,” Chairman Faleomavaega added.

But terrorism is not the only threat. Piracy has become a major problem all around the globe, including along the route of the two ships will take to Japan.

“So far this year, just in the waters off Somalia alone, pirates have attacked 61 ships. More than a dozen of those vessels remain in the pirates’ hands to this very day. I ask my colleagues, is the practice of transporting these lethal materials across international worth the risk? I say, absolutely not. It’s time for countries that produce nuclear waste to keep it within their own borders,” Chairman Faleomavaega concluded.

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