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NOTE BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

As President of the Security Council I am circulating the following reply from the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the letter dated 11 December 1975 from the Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations (S/11905) addressed to me as President of the Security Council.

"On 25 July 1974, the International Court of Justice found that the Government of Iceland was not entitled unilaterally to exclude British fishing vessels from the waters around Iceland 'or unilaterally to impose restrictions on the activities of those vessels in such areas'. Between 15 and 25 November 1975, the Icelandic coastguard vessels, supported by their aircraft, attacked a number of British trawlers in the area, damaging the equipment of at least seven of them. This marked a serious failure to comply with the decision of the Court. The attacks on the British vessels endangered the fishermen on board. Accordingly, the British Government despatched civilian, unarmed support vessels in order to prevent further attacks and protect the British fishing vessels. However, the attacks continued and so vessels of the Royal Navy were ordered to the area. The role of the vessels is solely to defend British trawlers against attacks by the Icelandic coastguard. Royal Navy vessels have at no stage in pursuance of this role entered the Icelandic 12-mile fisheries limit. Nor have British military aircraft penetrated Icelandic air space.

"British Ministers have made repeated efforts to resolve the question of fishing rights around Iceland by negotiations. However, on 15 November at the very time when the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr. R. Hattersley, was on his way to Reykjavik for talks, the Icelandic coastguards attacked two vessels. Despite this provocation, British Ministers have continued to negotiate and remain willing to seek a solution by any other peaceful means. The problem at the present time is Iceland's refusal to negotiate and its resort to attacks on British vessels.

"The British Government have long accepted that Iceland is highly dependent upon coastal fishing, as well as the need for proper conservation of fish stocks. But it is not Iceland alone that relies on fishing in the area. The International Court of Justice, in its decision of July 1974, found that elements of the British population depended for their livelihood

upon a measure of access to the fishing grounds around Iceland. The fishing ports of Fleetwood, Grimsby and Hull depend very largely on access to those grounds for their economic well-being, particularly with regard to employment. Whilst the general question of fishery limits in the future will be taken up again in March 1976 at the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, at present the question of fishing rights between Iceland and the United Kingdom is governed by the International Court of Justice decision.

"The matters referred to in the letter of the Icelandic Permanent Representative dated 11 December 1975 are part of a wider situation containing legal, economic, social and many other elements. The way of dealing with this situation is by way of negotiation. The British Government remains ready to resume negotiations at any place, at any time and at any level, as they have repeatedly made clear, in public and in private."

(Signed) Ivor RICHARD
President of the Security Council
