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Dixon, Pierson (Perm. Represent. of U.K. to the U.N.)

- 1 letter to D.H.

November 11, 1956.

The Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour, on instructions from Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, to make to him the following communication.

Her Majesty's Government wish to express their full support for the efforts of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to organise a salvage team for the clearance of the Suez Canal under the auspices of the United Nations. They are willing to release for this purpose any salvage ships now under charter to the British Admiralty.

In this connexion Her Majesty's Government wish to draw the attention of the Secretary-General to the very considerable resources which they have assembled in order to proceed as rapidly as possible with the unblocking of the Suez Canal. The clearance of the Canal requires ships with shallow draught and heavy lift. The United Kingdom possesses more of these coastal salvage vessels than any other country, and mine have been engaged by the British Admiralty for work in the Suez Canal. Apart from tugs, twenty-seven other salvage ships of other types, British and foreign, have also been engaged. Of this total of thirty-six salvage craft, eleven are already at or very near Port Said, and twenty-one of the remainder are at sea bound for Port Said. The British salvage officers with this team have great experience of port clearance. The work of surveying ships scuttled in Port Said harbour began even before fighting ceased there, and the actual work of clearance is already in hand.

Her Majesty's Government must draw attention to the acts of sabotage committed by the Egyptian authorities in the Canal. A preliminary survey has established that at least twenty-three large and small craft have been sunk in Port Said harbour and at the entrance of the Suez Canal. These craft have almost all been sunk in positions which

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show that there was a plain intention to block the Canal. There is no question of British or French air or naval action being responsible for these sinkings. No air attacks on shipping were ordered or carried out and no bombing of the town of Port Said or the harbour occurred. Naval shelling was directed entirely to the area west of the port and confined to beach defences. There is evidence to show that the craft were sunk on Egyptian orders before the Anglo-French parachute attack, probably on Friday, November 2. Dynamite was used to sink several of the craft, including one very large floating crane.

Apart from these sinkings at and near Port Said, it is known that two ships have been sunk across the Suez Canal at Port Tewfik, and two more in the harbour or out of the channel. A further sunk ship has been seen at Gebel Miriam and another just north of Lake Timsah. The latter ship was attacked by the Royal Air Force on November 1 in an attempt to prevent her being used to block the Suez Canal, but she remained afloat long enough for the Egyptians to tow her into the Canal and let her sink there.

Her Majesty's Government finally express their concern lest further ships may be sunk by the Egyptian authorities in the Canal. Twelve merchant ships of varied nationalities are trapped in the Canal, and the Egyptian authorities have been bringing pressure on their crews to abandon them. Her Majesty's Government therefore ask that United Nations observers should be sent immediately to investigate the position and to prevent further sabotage.

H.E. M. Dag Hammarskjold,
Secretary-General of the United Nations.