

STATEMENT

by

Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham of

the United States of America

at the 47th General Conference

of the International Atomic Energy Agency

Vienna, 16 September 2002

Thank you, Mr. President,

I give you my assurances that the entire United States delegation looks forward to working with you, with the distinguished representatives of the member states here today, with Director General ElBaradei, and with the Secretariat.

I am pleased to be with you today and to transmit a message from President Bush:

I send greetings to those gathered at the 47th conference on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Almost 50 years ago, President Eisenhower proposed the Atoms for Peace initiative, which established the principles that all nations must work to stem nuclear proliferation and that all responsible nations should enjoy the peaceful benefits of nuclear power and technology under sound non-proliferation conditions.

Since 1957, the IAEA has been the center of international efforts to turn these principles into practice.

Though the world has changed, and the roles of IAEA member states have changed with it, the ideas of non-proliferation and peaceful nuclear power remain unchanged. The work of preventing nuclear proliferation has taken on a sense of great urgency.

Today, as some states are seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, we must uphold our great responsibility to ensure full compliance with the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. With cooperation and strong leadership, we can combat the threat of nuclear proliferation and advance safety and security for people throughout the world.

Best wishes for a successful conference.

Fellow delegates, as President Bush has noted, fifty years ago, United States President Dwight Eisenhower announced an historic initiative called Atoms For Peace that led to the birth of this Agency, and laid the groundwork for steps that have been instrumental to controlling the spread of the atom, while making sure its peaceful benefits were available to all responsible nations.

Over those fifty years, the world has enjoyed enormous benefits from an impressive array of peaceful nuclear applications. However, the benefits of nuclear energy and the obligation to use it responsibly are linked. Dramatic changes in the security environment may affect our ability to enjoy such benefits in the future.

Two years ago, just after September 11, I spoke here of the need for member states to ramp up their efforts to address terrorist threats. We can be proud of our accomplishments so far.

The Agency's establishment of a nuclear security plan of action and a nuclear security fund, and the accelerated efforts to secure nuclear facilities worldwide, are but three of the many examples. Nothing is more important.. A failure to contain terrorist threats affects all of us - we are only as strong as the weakest link.

Last year, I discussed the need to address threats from high-risk, under-secured radiological sources – material that could be used for so-called “dirty bombs. And the international community has responded well, as exemplified by the many initiatives that this Agency has undertaken since last March's Conference on these high-risk materials.

The United States and Russia continue to accelerate our bilateral cooperative nonproliferation efforts, and we are making good progress.

Russia's Minister of Atomic Energy Alexander Rumyantsev and I have overseen efforts to reduce potential threats from undersecured nuclear materials in that country, to shut down reactors in Russia that still produce plutonium that could be used in nuclear weapons, and on many other fronts.

Such efforts are making the world more secure. But the nonproliferation regime is now facing serious challenges from a few rogue states seeking the capability to attain weapons of mass destruction, and from those states that facilitate such activity or often appear indifferent to it.

Sophisticated terrorist organizations are also pursuing WMD capabilities. Illicit efforts to acquire nuclear and radiological weapons technologies and materials continue to be reported.

Together, we must build on the successes of the past and overcome the challenges of the present, so that our ability to enjoy the benefits of peaceful nuclear cooperation can be expanded and sustained into the future. Let me focus on three areas where we can work together to strengthen the nonproliferation regime.

First, we need to strengthen further the safeguarding and physical protection of nuclear materials. Member states took an important step forward when the Board of Governors agreed to recommend an increase in the Agency's budget, primarily to support the Agency's verification work. My government strongly supports this increase.

President Bush has requested an increase of \$10 million in the Department of Energy's budget to support international safeguards in the coming year.

In the same vein, last year President Bush forwarded our Additional Protocol to the United States Senate for ratification. The United States Senate intends to hold hearings soon – a critical and essential step toward making strengthened safeguards a reality in the United States. Others need to act as well.

Second, we need to prevent the trafficking of nuclear and radiological materials and technologies for weapons purposes. The Proliferation Security Initiative is an important step

in this regard, and we welcome support for this initiative by all states that share our concerns about the proliferation of WMD.

But we must do more. We need to strengthen our export control systems. The President has proposed an increase in the Department of Energy's export control budget by \$6 million. This additional funding will help train and better equip customs guards and other border officials at home and abroad, develop new means of detection, and support many other steps.

This week, I also will sign a "Statement of Intent" with my Chinese counterpart on an exchange of nonproliferation assurances for the transfer of nuclear technology. This will help both our countries better realize the benefits of peaceful nuclear cooperation – while ensuring that this takes place within the context of strong nonproliferation commitments.

Finally, we need to stop nuclear smuggling at its source. Just over a month ago, the Netherlands decided formally to install equipment at the Rotterdam seaport to screen for shipments of radioactive and special nuclear materials. The United States will provide assistance for this effort. Others need to – and are – considering similar steps.

Third, we need to improve the security of research reactors or other such facilities where nuclear and non-nuclear radiological material may be co-located. Such facilities often support medical and industrial research and other legitimate peaceful applications of nuclear technology. If not adequately protected, such facilities could be vulnerable to sabotage, theft, or attack.

The United States is responding to this problem. In Romania, the United States will provide up to \$4 million to support the purchase of low-enriched uranium, to convert the Pitesti research reactor from highly enriched uranium fuel.

This will improve security, even as the reactor will continue to be used for peaceful purposes. This exemplifies what must be done to improve materials security at these sites, without sacrificing the peaceful benefits of nuclear technology. But more needs to be done and the United States strongly endorses IAEA efforts to address this problem.

To begin or accelerate the initiatives I have described, the United States will contribute an additional \$3 million to the IAEA's nuclear security fund and urges all member states to join us in making similar contributions, to the extent they are able, to ensure that these potential shortfalls in the regime are addressed.

Today, I have discussed with you practical steps that we can take to address a number of serious proliferation concerns. But the problem also needs to be considered in a broader context. All responsible members of the international community should be concerned about the threats from a few states whose actions could undermine the regime.

Atoms for Peace was an American initiative, and you can be assured that my country well recognizes the enormous benefits that have accrued from that regime over time. We support its objectives and remain strongly committed to working within its parameters.

But the NPT is being challenged, and we must take strong measures, including those I have outlined, to impede the efforts of those determined to undermine it. We must deal immediately and effectively with any state seeking to exploit the Treaty to its own advantage, ignoring both the letter and/or the spirit of their treaty obligations.

We have seen what happened when North Korea took this route. I am confident that progress will be made in dismantling the North Korean weapons program in the context of the six party talks. But we need to look at why North Korea, while a member of the NPT, was able to make so much progress on its weapons programs in the first place.

North Korea's activities send a worrisome message to other would-be proliferants. That message asserts that a state can be a member of the NPT, enjoy its benefits, and still put in place the assets it needs to break out of the Treaty, and pronounce itself a nuclear weapon state. This is the wrong message and we must learn from this chain of events, and not allow it to happen again.

All states that support the nonproliferation regime, and the peaceful benefits that it provides, need to take a clear view of the problem posed by proliferant states that attempt to flout the NPT, and address that problem realistically and with determination.

The United States is pleased with the resolution that was adopted by consensus at last week's Board of Governors meeting. I have earlier said, responsibility falls not only on the shoulders of states of concern, but on all nations vested in the viability and sustainability of the nonproliferation regime.

That is why the step taken last week at the Board of Governors was so important. It made clear that the international community will not tolerate erosions of the nonproliferation regime. It made clear that, consistent with the Director General's June 6 report and subsequent findings, Iran has not responded to repeated calls for cooperation and transparency.

Most importantly, it makes clear that the DPRK precedent is unacceptable and if the nonproliferation regime is to withstand serious challenges, member states must be prepared to take firm and necessary action.

Fifty years ago, President Eisenhower declared "if a danger exists in the world, it is a danger shared by all; and equally, that if hope exists in the mind of one nation, that hope should be shared by all. These words were true fifty years ago; they are still true today, and they should guide us in the choices we make in our pursuit of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Thank you very much and my best wishes for a successful conference