

Information Circular

INFCIRC/763

Date: 8 July 2009

General Distribution

Original: English

Communication dated 29 June 2009 received from the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan with regard to a press release to note a commemorative meeting of the 20th anniversary of shutting down of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site

1. The Secretariat has received a Note Verbale dated 29 June 2009 from the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan, transmitting the text of a press release to note a commemorative meeting of the 20th anniversary of shutting down of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site, which was held in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan on 18 June 2009.
2. As requested in that communication, the abovementioned press release is herewith circulated for the information of all Member States.

PRESS RELEASE

Twenty years ago today, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev by his degree officially closed the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. On 18 June 2009 a commemorative meeting was held in the city of Semipalatinsk. President Nursultan Nazarbayev, citizens of Kazakhstan and representatives of world mass media took part in it.

President of Kazakhstan in his introductory statement emphasized that for many years our country has been an epicenter of the nuclear weapons testing. The people and the land of Kazakhstan suffered pain and losses, when from 1949 through 1991 the Soviet Union carried out 456 nuclear tests at the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site. The total nuclear power of explosions was 2,500 times more than the power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

President said that the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site was a drama for the whole of Kazakhstan. The damage for the environment was so serious that hundreds of years are needed for its recovery. The ecological disaster zone around the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site occupies more than 300,000 square kilometers. One-ninth of all of the territory of Kazakhstan – a size comparable to the size of Germany – transformed into a toxic wasteland.

Despite the difficulties, the Government of Kazakhstan has never left its citizens alone with their problems. It has carried out the permanent work on social rehabilitation of the population and the territories exposed to the tests' influence. The State Programme on the complex solution of the problems of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site has been fully implemented and considerably improved the environmental situation of the affected region. The Government is currently working on the programme for the city of Semipalatinsk. Schools, hospitals and cultural venues are being constructed in the framework of this programme. 133,3 million dollars has already been spent on its implementation. 113,3 million dollars has been allocated in the framework of the "Road Map" for the region.

Kazakhstan leader called on the United Nations to proclaim August 29th - the day when 20 years ago the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site was finally closed - as the "International Day of Nuclear Weapons Renunciation". He stressed that addressing the problem of international security will be one of the main priorities in the forthcoming chairmanship of Kazakhstan in the OSCE.

President of Kazakhstan believes that the time has come to revise nonproliferation mechanisms. The international community has to evaluate all advantages and disadvantages of the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and make necessary corrections to meet modern challenges. States, which possess nuclear weapons, must show goodwill and fulfill a commitment to reduce their arsenals.

He expressed his support to the initiative of the President of Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev and the President of the United States of America Barack Obama on nuclear disarmament and reduction of strategic offensive arms.

IAEA Director General Mohamed El-Baradei believes that shutting down the nuclear test site at Semipalatinsk sent a strong signal of support by Kazakhstan for the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime. It contributed to the goals of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and underscores the principles of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. By constraining the further development of nuclear weapons, these measures to bring nuclear tests to a halt and to bring the test sites to closure are important steps towards nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

He also believes that Kazakhstan has played a significant role in the effort to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. Efforts by the five Central Asian states, including Kazakhstan brought into force a treaty establishing the nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asian region. Kazakhstan initiated the signing ceremony of the Treaty on Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in Central Asia on September 8, 2006 to be held in Semipalatinsk.

This year Kazakhstan also marks the 15th anniversary of the removal from its territory of all nuclear devices that our country had inherited after the break-up of Soviet Union. Kazakhstan has set a commendable example by voluntarily giving up its nuclear arsenal, the fourth largest in the world, which was larger than that of the UK, France and China combined.

These actions on the part of Kazakhstan and its broad support for IAEA safeguards contributed greatly to the international and regional security. On a global scale, such efforts, taken collectively, would lead to the world free of nuclear weapons.