07 November 2003

Text: U.S., Russia on Return of Russian Research Reactor Fuel

Joint Statement signed Nov. 7 in Washington on repatriation of reactor fuel to Russia

Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham and Russian Minister for Atomic Energy Aleksandr Rumyantsev signed a joint statement November 7 in Washington reaffirming the two countries' commitment to a program of transferring high enriched uranium (HEU) research reactor fuel of Russian origin to Russia.

"This Joint Statement commits us to develop a schedule by the end of the year for the completion of this program," said Abraham. Their common objective, he said, is to reduce and to the extent possible eliminate the use of HEU "in civil nuclear activity by returning to Russia all of the Russian origin HEU scattered throughout the countries of the Former Soviet Union."

The United States and Russia, in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), began work on fuel return in December 1999.

"We are focusing our efforts on repatriating Russian-supplied fuel from more than 20 research reactors in 17 countries," Abraham said. "Moreover, we plan to convert these targeted research reactors so that they use low-enriched uranium fuel instead of HEU."

Minimizing international commerce in HEU "has long been a pillar of U.S. nonproliferation policy," he said. "This program exemplifies the strength of the U.S and Russian Federation partnership to reduce the threat of terrorism and prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction."

Following are the texts of Abraham's remarks and the Joint Statement:

(begin text)

JOINT STATEMENT/SIGNING CEREMONY WITH RUSSIAN ATOMIC ENERGY MINISTER RUMYANTSEV
Washington, D.C.
November 7, 2003

REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF ENERGY SPENCER ABRAHAM

I am extremely pleased to be here today with my colleague and friend, Minister Rumyantsev, as we take another important step forward in our cooperative efforts to reduce global stockpiles of weapons-usable nuclear materials.

The Joint Statement that we are signing today reaffirms our commitment to the common objective of reducing, and to the extent possible, ultimately eliminating the use of Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) in civil nuclear activity by returning to Russia all of the Russian origin HEU scattered throughout the countries of the Former Soviet Union. This Joint Statement commits us to develop a schedule by the

end of the year for the completion of this program.

Our two countries began developing this new program with the International Atomic Energy Agency in December 1999, when we first planned for the transfer of fresh and irradiated HEU currently stored at foreign research reactors back to the Russian Federation, where it originated.

We are focusing our efforts on repatriating Russian-supplied fuel from more than 20 research reactors in 17 countries. Moreover, we plan to convert these targeted research reactors so that they use low-enriched uranium fuel instead of HEU.

Our efforts are well under way. Just recently, in September 2003, Russia accepted approximately 14 kilograms of fresh Russian-origin HEU from Romania. The HEU was airlifted from the Vinca reactor in Serbia Montenegro to Russia where it will be down-blended and used for nuclear power plant fuel fabrication. This was the first effort of this kind to repatriate Russian-origin spent fuel back to Russia.

We have nearly completed preparations for the next shipment of fresh HEU fuel from another country, as well as for our first shipment of spent HEU fuel from Uzbekistan to Russia.

Our governments have completed negotiations on a bilateral agreement under which more then a dozen other countries will become eligible to ship their fresh and spent research reactor fuel to Russia for safe and secure disposition.

I am delighted to report that this agreement will soon be finalized and signed. Furthermore, our governments intend to conduct bilateral consultations between MinAtom of Russia and the Department of Energy to develop a schedule for all remaining potential shipments of fresh and irradiated HEU fuel.

The goal of minimizing international commerce in HEU has long been a pillar of U.S. nonproliferation policy. This program exemplifies the strength of the U.S-Russian Federation partnership to reduce the threat of terrorism and prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, this program inaugurates an important initiative to close a major gap in previous efforts to consolidate HEU dispersed around the world.

This latest advance in our efforts is the result of years of broad cooperation on a number of fronts to improve and accelerate our program to reduce global stockpiles of weapons-usable nuclear materials.

I would like to highlight just a few of the key accomplishments of our cooperative effort.

- We have accelerated the timeline for completing the security upgrades for protecting weapons usable nuclear material in Russia from 2010 to 2008.

- We have already secured nearly half this material, located at over 55 sites in Russia and the Newly Independent States.

- We have secured 78 percent of the Russian Navy sites and we are also securing at-risk warheads at 20 percent of the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces sites.

- We have employed 13,000 former weapons scientists at 180 institutes across the former Soviet Union in non-military, commercial pursuits. The projects attracted $125M in private-sector matching contributions and $96M in venture capital.

- We are shutting down Russia's last three reactors still producing plutonium, replacing those reactors with fossil fuel plants.

- We called for and co-chaired a major international conference in Vienna earlier this year on improving the security of high-risk, undersecured radioactive sources throughout the world that could be usable in radiological dispersion devices (RDDs). The conference, attended by 140 nations, resulted in recommendations to secure these materials which are already underway.

- We worked with G-8 members to establish the Global Partnership, proposed by President Bush,that is making available $20 billion for cooperative nonproliferation work with Russia.

- We have downblended more than 200 metric tons of HEU from Russia's dismantled nuclear weapons for use in U.S. nuclear power plants - enough material for approximately 8,000 nuclear weapons.

I look forward to our continued joint work on these important endeavors. It is clear that we are building momentum for these cooperative programs to eliminate the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction on many fronts. The agreement we are about to sign represents the latest important effort on these fronts.

(end Abraham remarks)

(begin joint statement)

JOINT STATEMENT OF U.S. SECRETARY OF ENERGY SPENCER ABRAHAM AND MINISTER OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION FOR ATOMIC ENERGY ALEKSANDR RUMYANTSEV ON COOPERATION TO TRANSFER RUSSIAN-ORIGIN HIGH-ENRICHED URANIUM RESEARCH REACTOR FUEL TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The U.S. Department of Energy and MinAtom of Russia recognize the great significance of cooperation in the issue of transferring high enriched uranium (HEU) research reactor fuel of Russian origin to the Russian Federation as a mutual contribution to the reduction of global stockpiles of weapons-usable nuclear materials and, therefore, to reducing the threat of international terrorism and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Such cooperation, which is being implemented with the active involvement of the International Atomic Energy Agency, supports the objective of transferring to the Russian Federation fresh and spent HEU fuel from research reactors currently located in research centers of 17 foreign countries. An important component of this activity is the conversion of such research reactors from HEU to low enriched uranium (LEU) fuel when a suitable LEU fuel has been qualified. To this end, we are jointly developing LEU fuel.

HEU can be directly used in manufacturing nuclear weapons. Our common objective consists of reducing, to the greatest extent possible, and, ultimately, eliminating the use of such materials in civilian nuclear activity.

We have real examples of cooperation in this area. Two shipments of Russian-origin fresh HEU research reactor fuel to Russia have taken place. We have already started preparations for the next fresh HEU shipment. Preparations also are in progress for the transfer of spent HEU fuel from Uzbekistan to Russia. Completion of a bilateral Government-to-Government Agreement under which more than a

dozen other countries will become eligible to ship their fresh and spent research reactor fuel to Russia for safe and secure disposition is in its final stages. It is expected that this Agreement will be signed shortly.

By the end of the year, we intend to conduct bilateral consultations between MinAtom of Russia and the U.S. Department of Energy to develop a schedule for all remaining potential shipments of fresh and irradiated HEU fuel.

Signed at Washington, DC, in duplicate, this 7th day of November, 2003, in the English and Russian languages.

[signed]
U.S. SECRETARY OF ENERGY
S. ABRAHAM

[signed]
MINISTER OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION FOR ATOMIC ENERGY
A.Yu. RUMYANTSEV

(end text)

get xml version