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**TRANSCRIPT of Secretary Abraham
and
Russian Atomic Energy Minister Romyantsev
at Announcement of Joint Statement on Fuel Return
Washington, DC
November 7, 2003**

Ambassador Linton Brooks: Good morning and thank you for coming. This event is the fruition of many hours of close collaboration between the Department of Energy and our Russian counterparts.

Shortly after September of 2001, it became apparent to Secretary Abraham and Minister Romyantsev that cooperative nonproliferation would be an essential tool to keep weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of terrorists. And for two years, the two Ministers have made these programs a high priority. The payoffs have been considerable. For example, some programs have been advanced a full two years because of their leadership.

One area where it has become apparent that more work is needed concerns highly enriched uranium at research reactors throughout the world. This material is vulnerable to threat of sabotage and could be tempting to terrorists. And the Statement of Intent being signed today brings us closer to reducing the global stockpile of easily available weapons-usable material. It's now my pleasure to introduce a man who is a scientist, a diplomat, and a partner, the Minister of Atomic Energy of the Russian Federation, the Honorable Aleksandr Romyantsev.

MINISTER RUMYANTSEV [Interpreted from Russian]: Thank you very much, my dear friends, Secretary Abraham, the Ambassador.

I'm very glad to have this opportunity to speak to you once again, and I had this chance last year. We've done a lot of useful activity together jointly with my friend, Secretary Abraham. In March this year, under the auspices of the IAEA, we convinced--we held the international conference regarding the open(?) nuclear radioactive sources, and this international conference called the community, the world community, to pay more attention to such sources in order for proper handling and disposition of these sources. The view of nuclear reactors is also a very serious topic from the point of view of nuclear fissile material, accounting, control, and physical protection. Most of the research reactors really use the fuel, the material, which could be used by terrorists for their own purposes to--for their own purposes.

Well, together with Department of Energy and under the auspices of the IAEA, we conducted the confidential operation with regard to removal of fresh fuel from research reactor in Vinca, which is located in Serbia Montenegro.

Today we are going to make forward a very important step, and we are going to sign the joint statement regarding the irradiated fuel from research reactor, and this will be the basis for the signing of the government-to-government agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the United States.

These types of reactors were constructed in the Eastern European countries and in CIS countries. Due to the political or economic reasons in these countries, they have to remove this material, and now we are looking into the future in order to prevent all the unexpected events regarding the involvement of these materials or the fact that such materials may be obtained by the terrorists.

I do believe that the audience which is here is involved in the very sensitive area of activity. And I would like to wish you success, and I would like that the nuclear power will lead us only to the progress and not some tragic events against which we are partner for.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Ambassador Linton Brooks: And now it's my pleasure to introduce a man who in the past three years has become a symbol both of strong support for nonproliferation and of the new relationship that the two Presidents are forging between the United States and the Russian Federation, Secretary of Energy, the Honorable Spencer Abraham.

SECRETARY ABRAHAM: Thank you.

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

I want to just take one moment to express personal thanks to the people at MinAtom and the Department of Energy who work on these programs. To our Russian guests who are here today I say thank you. Please pass to your colleagues in MinAtom our appreciation for the extensive time and commitment and hard work that goes into these programs.

And for our team here at the Department of Energy, both the folks who work here in Washington and our team in Moscow, Andrew and all of your team, I want to also say thanks for the hard work that went into this trip and all of the projects we work on.

The accomplishments which Minister Rumyantsev and I are so proud of are ones that have been achieved because of your collective efforts.

This is not easy work, but it's extremely important work. And we are grateful for your commitment to address these problems as successfully as you have.

The joint statement which 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 in civil nuclear activity by returning to Russia all of 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 IAEA 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 for more than 20 research reactors in 17 countries. Moreover, we plan to convert these targeted research reactors so that they use low-enriched uranium instead of HEU.

Our efforts are well under way. Just recently, in September, Russia accepted approximately 14 kilograms of fresh Russian-origin HEU from Romania. And before that, as Minister Rumyantsev said, we successfully retrieved fuel from the Vinca reactor.

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. And our governments have completed negotiations on a bilateral 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.

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

This goal of minimizing international commerce in HEU has long been a pillar of U.S. nonproliferation policy. And 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 advance in our efforts is the result of recent 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'd like to just highlight a few of the key accomplishments of this cooperative effort: We've accelerated the timeline for completing the security upgrades for protecting weapons-usable nuclear material in Russia from 2010 to 2008, two full years.

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

We've 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 \$125 million in private sector matching contributions and \$96 million in venture capital.

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

As Minister Rumyantsev said, we called for and co-chaired a major international conference earlier this year in Vienna on improving the security of high-risk, undersecured radioactive sources throughout the world.

These sources could be used for the development of radiological dispersal devices or dirty bombs, and the conference was attended by 140 nations and resulted in recommendations to secure those materials, which are already under way.

And the list goes on and on and will continue to go on and on, because these programs are important and because we are committed to working together for their successful completion. 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. And the agreement we are about to sign, if I ever finish this speech--will be yet another step forward in that effort.

Thank you all very much.

SECRETARY ABRAHAM: We would be happy to take a couple of questions from the media who are here, but I'm not quite sure where, because of the lights, the press members are. So if there are any questions, I'll let Jeanne Lopatto maybe sort of stage-manage that effort. And if there aren't any questions, that's okay, too.

MR. : I just want to be absolutely clear. This isn't the agreement itself governing the return of the fuel. It's an intention to sign that agreement and a statement that agreement will be signed.

SECRETARY ABRAHAM: We already have been operating--as we both indicated, we've already been doing, on a case-by-case basis doing some of these projects. But our intent in giving the government-to-government agreement is to put in place a broader mechanism so that we can speed up that process and have a framework for moving a number of these programs ahead more quickly.

MR. : Okay. So the case-by-case method that's been used in the past in Vinca and in Romania won't be necessary once this agreement is signed?

SECRETARY ABRAHAM: Right. You know, that has at least allowed us to begin the process, but we think a government-to-government agreement allows us to move more quickly in the future and within an agreed-upon framework. And I think it will really allow us to do this work much quicker.

MR. : [inaudible, off microphone]. What is the status [inaudible] financial arrangement?

SECRETARY ABRAHAM: I think all of the components are pretty close to final agreement. There's obviously some additional interagency clearances that need to be accomplished to get concurrence on both sides from all of the relevant agencies that participate in or sign off on these agreements.

I don't know if you wish to--

MINISTER RUMYANTSEV [Interpreted from Russian]: As Secretary Abraham mentioned, we are trying to speed up our cooperation in this area. So today we signed a joint statement not to lose time and start the activity exactly in time. I do believe that this government-to-government agreement will be signed at the end of November or early December.

MINISTER RUMYANTSEV [Interpreted from Russian]: With regard to research reactor (?), it lies within several tenths of kilograms up to 100 kilograms. With regard to the fuel, it will be

used for the nuclear power plants, and irradiated fuel, after (?) chemical reprocessing, will be involved in the electricity generation. The radioactive waste will be (?)-itrified and will be disposed of at specific sites, storage facilities.

THE INTERPRETER: I'll translate for everyone. Does this agreement mean that the states from territories of which this research reactor fuel will be removed will be denied the opportunity to do any research, whether it will be application type research or fundamental research in the nuclear area?

MINISTER RUMYANTSEV [Interpreted from Russian]: Well, if there is a governmental decision to close nuclear centers, that is the case for Vinca nuclear center, then these nuclear centers will be closed, and from Vinca we'll move to fresh fuel and spent nuclear fuel. With regard to Uzbekistan fuel, we are going to remove the fuel which is stored in the storage facilities of the nuclear center, and this particular nuclear center in Uzbekistan will be involved in fundamental and applied research activity.

We are trying to reduce the threat of proliferation and eliminate any possibility that such material could be obtained by the terrorists.

SECRETARY ABRAHAM: I would just add that, first of all, the host governments are obviously involved in these programs, in these efforts.

Second, they recognize the threat that exists as much as we do.

Third, we're prepared to help supply them with alternative fueling source for their--of the less dangerous sort for the reactors. So we're not mandating that people go out of the research business, only that they do it in a way that's safer. And that varies from country to country. In some cases, the program is no longer an active one or a very active one, and the decision has been made not to continue the work. But the fuel remains dangerous and exposed.

MR. : All right. Thank you all.

Media Contact(s):
Jeanne Lopatto, 202-586-4940

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