

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at the United Nations Security Council Summit on Nonproliferation and Nuclear Disarmament in New York City

September 24, 2009

The 6191st meeting of the Security Council is called to order. The provisional agenda for this meeting is before the Council in document S/Agenda/6191, which reads, quote, "Maintenance of international peace and security, nuclear proliferation, and nuclear disarmament." Unless I hear any objection, I shall consider the agenda adopted. Agenda is adopted.

I wish to warmly welcome the distinguished heads of state and Government, the Generals—the Secretary-General, the Director General of the IAEA, ministers, and other distinguished representatives present in the Security Council chamber. Your presence is an affirmation of the importance of the subject matter to be discussed.

The Security Council summit will now begin its consideration of item two of the agenda. Members of the Council have before them document S/2009/473, which contains the text of a draft resolution prepared in the course of the Council's prior consultations. I wish to draw Council members' attention to document S/2009/463 containing a letter dated 16 September 2009 from the United States of America transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration. In accordance with the understanding reached earlier among members, the Security Council will take action on the draft resolution before it prior to hearing statements from the Secretary-General and Council members. Accordingly, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now. Will those in favor of the draft resolution contained in document S/2009/473 please raise their hand? The results of the voting is as follows: The draft resolution is received unanimously, 15 votes in favor. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as Resolution 1887 of 2009.

I want to thank again everybody who is in attendance. I wish you all good morning. In the six-plus decades that this Security Council has been in existence, only four other meetings of this nature have been convened. I called for this one so that we may address at the highest level a fundamental threat to the security of all peoples and all nations: the spread and use of nuclear weapons.

As I said yesterday, this very institution was founded at the dawn of the atomic age, in part because man's capacity to kill had to be contained. And although we averted a nuclear nightmare during the cold war, we now face proliferation of a scope and complexity that demands new strategies and new approaches. Just one nuclear weapon exploded in a city, be it New York or Moscow, Tokyo or Beijing, London or Paris, could kill hundreds of thousands of people, and it would badly destabilize our security, our economies, and our very way of life.

Once more, the United Nations has a pivotal role to play in preventing this crisis. The historic resolution we just adopted enshrines our shared commitment to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons, and it brings Security Council agreement on a broad framework for action to reduce nuclear dangers as we work toward that goal. It reflects the agenda I outlined in Prague and builds on a consensus that all nations have the right to peaceful nuclear energy, that nations with nuclear weapons have the responsibility to move toward disarmament and those without them have the responsibility to forsake them.

Today the Security Council endorsed a global effort to lock down all vulnerable nuclear materials within 4 years. The United States will host a summit next April to advance this goal and help all nations achieve it. This resolution will also help strengthen the institutions and initiatives that combat the smuggling, financing, and theft of proliferation-related materials. It calls on all states to freeze any financial assets that are being used for proliferation. And it calls for stronger safeguards to reduce the likelihood that peaceful nuclear weapons programs can be diverted to a weapons program—that peaceful nuclear programs can be diverted to a weapons program.

The resolution we passed today will also strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We have made it clear that the Security Council has both the authority and the responsibility to respond to violations to this treaty. We've made it clear that the Security Council has both the authority and responsibility to determine and respond as necessary when violations of this treaty threaten international peace and security.

That includes full compliance with Security Council resolutions on Iran and North Korea. Let me be clear: This is not about singling out individual nations; it is about standing up for the rights of all nations who do live up to their responsibilities. The world must stand together, and we must demonstrate that international law is not an empty promise and that treaties will be enforced.

The next 12 months will be absolutely critical in determining whether this resolution and our overall efforts to stop the spread and use of nuclear weapons are successful. And all nations must do their part to make this work. In America, I have promised that we will pursue a new agreement with Russia to substantially reduce our strategic warheads and launchers. We will move forward with the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and open the door to deeper cuts in our own arsenal. In January, we will call upon countries to begin negotiations on a treaty to end the production of fissile material for weapons. And the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May will strengthen that agreement.

Now, we harbor no illusions about the difficulty of bringing about a world without nuclear weapons. We know there are plenty of cynics and that there will be setbacks to prove their point. But there will also be days like today that push us forward, days that tell a different story. It is the story of a world that understands that no difference or division is worth destroying all that we have built and all that we love. It is a recognition that can bring people of different nationalities and ethnicities and ideologies together. In my own country, it has brought Democrats and Republican leaders together, leaders like George Shultz, Bill Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, who are with us here today.

And it was a Republican President, Ronald Reagan, who once articulated the goal we now seek in the starkest of terms. I quote: "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. And no matter how great the obstacles may seem, we must never stop our efforts to reduce the weapons of war. We must never stop until all—we must never stop at all until we see the day when nuclear arms have been banished from the face of the Earth." That is our task. That can be our destiny. And we will leave this meeting with a renewed determination to achieve this shared goal. Thank you.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than 5 minutes in order to enable the Council to carry on its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the chamber.

I shall now invite the distinguished Secretary-General, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon, to take the floor.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:36 a.m. at United Nations Headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to Director General Mohamed ElBaradei of the International Atomic Energy Agency; former Secretaries of State George P. Shultz and Henry Kissinger; former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry; and former Sen. Samuel A. Nunn of Georgia.

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Names: Ban Ki-moon; ElBaradei, Mohamed; Kissinger, Henry A.; Nunn, Samuel A.; Perry, William J.; Shultz, George P.

Subjects: Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Nonproliferation efforts; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Security; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia, proposed expansion; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: U.S. nuclear stockpile, reduction; Atomic Energy Agency, International; Iran : U.N. Security Council Resolutions, noncompliance; New York : President's visits; North Korea : U.N. Security Council Resolutions, noncompliance; Russia : Nuclear weapons stockpile, reduction; Russia : Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with U.S., proposed expansion; United Nations : Secretary-General; United Nations : Security Council.

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