

STATEMENT

by Yerlik AI - Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Ethiopia
Permanent Representative to the AU
on the occasion of the 25th anniversary
since the closure of Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site

**Excellencies,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Invited Guests,**

Let me start by thanking you for accepting our invitation to today's event.

It gives me a great pleasure to warmly welcome you all to this photo exhibition, dedicated to the 25th anniversary since the closure of Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site.

My sincere thanks go to the African Union for its assistance to arrange this meeting.

August 29, 1991 is marked by an event of historic significance both for my country and the whole world.

This date symbolizes the shutdown of Semipalatinsk's nuclear test site in Kazakhstan where the Soviet Union tested hundreds of nuclear devices over four decades.

August 29 is also declared by the UN as the International Day against Nuclear Tests.

In this regard I would like to stress that by adopting a decree on closing the largest nuclear test site in the world, Kazakhstan was the first to take such a step.

I would like to inform you that the decision to close the test site was made when Kazakhstan was still a part of the former USSR.

At that time, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, we owned the fourth largest nuclear and missile arsenal in the world. There were 104 intercontinental SS-18 ("Satan") ballistic missiles in our territory. 1400 nuclear warheads were placed inside them. That potential was bigger than the nuclear forces of France, Britain and China combined.

The Semipalatinsk test site had a strong research infrastructure, ready for the production and improvement of nuclear weapons.

Besides Kazakhstan controlling a quarter of the world's natural uranium

reserves, it had the full cycle of its enrichment, production of nuclear fuel, reactors and facilities.

All I want to say is that in order to renounce such a powerful potential, Kazakhstan needed a strong political will.

A part of our society had been exposed to the temptation to remain a nuclear power.

Renouncement of nuclear weapons and nuclear status was our deliberate, sincere choice. It was a voluntary act.

It's worth noting that nearly four decades of continuous testing of nuclear weapons in our territory caused tremendous harm to land and the health of the nation.

456 nuclear and thermonuclear tests were held. Over one and a half million people lived near the test site of 300,000 square kilometers. Now it is difficult to imagine that the territory of Rwanda was the size of the test site.

In this regard it sounds ridiculous that the military leadership's documents about building a test site in Kazakhstan contained insidious phrases about this place being "deserted."

Not only the test site itself but also the adjacent areas were exposed to intense radioactive contamination.

This resulted in radiation pathologies affecting people living around the area as well as its wildlife. Experts estimate that up to 500,000 people were exposed to radiation. And what's worse, several generations of Kazakh people will be affected by the consequences of those tests.

Kazakh people suffered from nuclear tests, perhaps more than any other country and people in the world.

Excellences,

I would like to inform you some facts about Kazakhstan's contribution to nuclear security since gaining independence in 1991.

By renouncing and decommissioning its nuclear arsenal, the world's fourth

largest at that time, and by shutting down the Test Site, Kazakhstan became a world leader in the movement to ban nuclear weapons and ensure nuclear security.

By doing that, Kazakhstan became a steadfast champion for nuclear non-proliferation – a role it plays to this date.

In a quarter of a century, using its own example, Kazakhstan has developed an effective model to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world.

First, a voluntary decision is based on a broad national consensus to close the test site, renounce the possession of nuclear weapons and prohibit their deployment in the country at any time in the future.

Second, in 2006 Kazakhstan and its four neighbors in the region signed The Semipalatinsk Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia. In 2015, all its members, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan received security assurances from the P5, issued as a special protocol.

Thus, taking into account the Budapest Memorandum signed in 1994 by the nuclear powers, our country has double security assurances.

Third, Kazakhstan is a party to all international treaties in the field of nuclear safety.

Forth, Kazakhstan's model of denuclearization is based on broad international cooperation of our nation with Russia, the US and several other countries, as well as with international organizations.

In this respect, in 2012, the Joint Statement of the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Russia and the United States regarding the Trilateral Cooperation at the Former Semipalatinsk Test Site was adopted.

Kazakh people particularly appreciate the contribution of Japan and European Union countries, to decontaminate and restore the ecological balance in the territory of the former test site, these countries also provide medical assistance to victims of radiation.

In 2015, Kazakhstan and Japan assumed co-chairmanship in the Article 14 of

Conference of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, seeking to bring this important international instrument closer to entry into force.

Fifth, by abandoning its nuclear status, Kazakhstan has managed to develop civil nuclear energy including nuclear power and the production of nuclear fuel. Kazakhstan has created a successfully working National Nuclear Center and the National Atomic Company.

Kazakhstan has also become the depositaries of an international bank of low-enriched nuclear fuel. In 2015, the Government of Kazakhstan signed a host country agreement with the IAEA to establish a low-enriched uranium bank to provide the world with a guaranteed supply of the fuel for civic nuclear energy, thus making an important contribution to strengthening the non-proliferation regime.

I would like to note that in the 21st century there is no reasonable alternative for a world free of the threat of a global nuclear war.

The feeling of common threat of a world nuclear conflict is partially put to sleep.

However, the reality is that the adopted agreements did not hinder the extension of the nuclear powers club at the end of the 20th century.

International law, unfortunately, includes a lot of ambiguities, allowing bypassing the regime of bans on military atomic use.

Firstly, in the 21st century humanity reached such a development point, when not even an amount of accumulated nuclear weapons is a mortal challenge for global security but the mere fact of its presence.

This is a serious argument for the joint participation of all the world countries in the non-proliferation process.

This vision was presented in details in the Manifesto "The World. The 21st century" proposed by our President Nazarbayev.

Secondly, the nuclear arsenal reduction process should be multilateral, with the engagement of all states, who de-facto possess such types of military power.

This should be preceded by the full legalization of status of the states that are currently related to the "threshold" group.

All nuclear powers should negotiate the development of a comprehensive treaty

for the reduction of nuclear arms.

Thirdly, the international legal framework of nuclear security in the 21st century should be solidified.

On December 7, 2015, under the initiative of Kazakhstan, the UN General Assembly for the first time in human history adopted the Universal Declaration for the Achievement of a Nuclear Weapon-Free World.

An actually operating mechanism of strict measures against holding and proliferation of nuclear weapon should be developed.

Such international agreements should be approved by resolutions of the UN Security Council. And we will work hard on that being the non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2017-2018.

Excellencies!

Taking this opportunity I would like to inform you that according to the initiative of our President Nazarbayev the capital city of Kazakhstan will host the Astana Peace Summit.

Concluding my speech, I would like to reiterate that Kazakhstan has always been an adamant proponent of nuclear disarmament – in order to create a world without nuclear weapons.

Thank you for your kind attention.