STATEMENT
BY
AMBASSADOR ABDUL SAMAD MINTY
SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR DISARMAMENT
AT THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

AT THE FIRST SESSION OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE
2010 REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES
TO THE TREATY ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR
WEAPONS

CLUSTER III ISSUES:

THE PEACEFUL USES OF NUCLEAR ENERGY

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Chairperson,

My delegation fully associates itself with the statement delivered by Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement on the peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

South Africa is of the view that the NPT’s role in promoting international peace and security is based on the delicate balance of the Treaty’s three pillars of non-proliferation, disarmament and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Article IV of the NPT states in no uncertain terms that nothing in the Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all Parties to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of the Treaty.

Chairperson,

South Africa will continue to promote international co-operation in the field of peaceful nuclear activities, as envisaged in Article III (3) of the NPT and also encourages the exchange of scientific information, particularly in Africa, for the further development of the applications of atomic energy for peaceful purposes in accordance with preambular paragraph 7 of the Treaty. Since 1993 there has been development of the South African Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR) which entails the building of a demonstration reactor project near Cape Town and a pilot fuel plant near Pretoria. According to the current schedule, construction will commence in 2008 and it is expected that the demonstration plant will be completed in 2012. The first commercial PBMR modules are planned for 2016. South Africa intends to eventually produce approximately up to 5000 MW of power from pebble bed reactors in South Africa, which would mean between 20 and 33 PBMR reactors of 165 MW each.

South Africa highly appreciates the assistance being rendered by the International Atomic Energy Agency in developing the PBMR project in keeping with the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) statutory mandate to pursue technical co-operation in the peaceful application of nuclear energy. We also commend the assistance provided by the IAEA to developing countries in planning for and the use of nuclear science and technology for various peaceful purposes. This is especially relevant in the context of achieving social and economic goals, including, inter alia, for the generation of electricity, and also to facilitate the transfer of such technology and knowledge in a sustainable manner.

Chairperson,

My delegation is of the view that safety and security aspects are interlinked and need to be addressed simultaneously. South Africa takes note of the good record of global nuclear safety. Performance, but would warn about possible complacency. Our own recent experience with the shutdown of one unit at the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station reflects how important it is to make sure that emergency preparedness and responses are in place and functional. We all need to ensure that our emergency response programmes are constantly updated and adapted to the latest state-of-the-art. We encourage States Parties to make use of the Agency’s support of national activities, such as training courses and emergency exercises, which could include participation by local organizations and population.

South Africa will also organize the IAEA’s Postgraduate Course on Radiation Protection in July this year as a contribution towards regional capacity building in regulatory frameworks and infrastructure. Last year the South African Government published the Radioactive Waste Management Policy and Strategy and we are now in the final stages of drafting the necessary legislation that will give effect to these policy provisions. In November 2006, South Africa deposited its Instrument of Accession to the Joint Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) is expected to be ratified in April 2007.

Chairperson,

There is recognition that energy security is one of the most pressing challenges that we are confronted with. Energy security remains indispensable for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of the lives of our people. One of the elements of ensuring energy security is the sustainable utilisation of primary energy sources by a country. In this connection, plans are on track in South Africa to declare uranium as a strategic mineral. To this end studies are currently also being conducted to determine the extent and feasibility of recommencing fuel cycle activities and the possible benefit it may hold for South Africa. The ultimate goal of South Africa is to realise localisation of fabrication of nuclear components involved in aspects of nuclear power generation and the nuclear fuel cycle.
It is within this context that South Africa is closely following the discussions and proposals on international fuel cycle facilities and fuel assurances. In this respect, my delegation is of the view that a safe orderly system to fuel civilian nuclear reactors is needed that would not add to the danger of nuclear weapon proliferation. However, States should have reliable access, at reasonable cost, to fuel for civilian reactors. Several countries have such facilities, and the objective should not be to maintain the status quo – it should be equitable – any distinction made in this regard would only exacerbate existing inequalities.

Chairperson,

The peaceful application of nuclear energy is of particular relevance and importance to Africa given the urgent need for sustainable and accelerated economic growth on the Continent. In this context, a number of IAEA projects are of strategic importance to developing countries, particularly in Africa, and can provide the necessary impetus for accelerated sustainable economic development, thereby playing a meaningful role in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and enhancing the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). My delegation would encourage the widest possible involvement of all States Parties, particularly developing countries, in the ongoing research and development activities of the IAEA.

South Africa believes that the IAEA’s Technical Co-operation activities have the potential to make a substantial contribution in this regard, as well as in the application of nuclear techniques in combating the occurrence of infectious diseases such as TB, malaria, and HIV/AIDS, which continue to hamper economic prosperity and development in many parts of the world. The Technical Co-operation projects of the Agency are therefore more than just political commitments. They constitute important building blocks to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Agency’s projects address many of the MDGs, particularly the areas of water, environmental sustainability, combating disease, hunger and poverty, maternal health and child health. To reach the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration by 2015, we must continue to ensure that the implementation of the Agency’s technical assistance programme to the benefit of developing and in particular least developed countries.

Over the years, developing countries have repeatedly stressed the need for the funding of the Agency’s Technical Co-operation projects to be sufficient, predictable and assured. They have also stressed the need for the Technical Co-operation budget to be increased as it is clearly not sufficient. Although it is acknowledged that contributions to the Technical Co-operation Fund is currently voluntary, my delegation reiterates its view that we need to allocate more resources that would provide assured and predictable funding to enable the Agency to undertake its statutory mandate “to seek to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world.”

Chairperson,

In conclusion, South Africa believes that the strength and credibility of the NPT rests on a fundamental bargain which must be recognized and upheld if we want the Treaty to be effective by virtue of its own merits rather than to let it be used to serve selective interests through the perpetuation of discrimination and imbalance. The peaceful use of nuclear energy is an integral part of this equation.

It remains a concern that while demands are being made for non-nuclear-weapon States to agree to new measures in the name of non-proliferation, concrete actions towards nuclear disarmament are neglected. South Africa wishes to reiterate that it cannot support unwarranted restrictions on the NPT’s guaranteed access to such nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes by States that are fully compliant with their obligations under the NPT. The imposition of additional restrictive measures on some NPT States Parties while allowing others to have access to these capabilities, only serves to exacerbate existing inequalities that are already inherent in the NPT and undermines one of the central bargains that are contained in the Treaty.

I thank you.