Statement by Ambassador Marguerita Ragsdale
Director, Office of Multilateral Nuclear and Security Affairs
Department of State
United States of America

Cluster 3 (Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy)

Third Session of the Preparatory Committee
2010 Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

May 8, 2009
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
This week, we are setting the stage for the eighth review of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, Article IV of which recognizes the right of Parties to develop the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and commits them to international cooperation to spread its benefits. Since this historic Treaty entered into force on March 5, 1970, scientists around the world have identified many new ways to enlist the atom for peaceful purposes. As a result of this human ingenuity, poverty has been reduced, the number of hungry has diminished, and the well-being of humanity has been lifted to a higher level around the world.

Peaceful uses of the atom -- from medical isotopes to the production of electrical power to the desalination of sea water -- have healed, lit the homes of, and put drinking water into the hands of millions. As our population grows and economies further develop, the demand for peaceful nuclear applications will only rise. In the words of President Obama, "we must harness the power of nuclear energy on behalf of our efforts to combat climate change, and to advance peace and opportunity for all people."

Global interest in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy is expanding. Indeed, the IAEA reports that nearly 60 states have sought its counsel in the development of safe, secure, and well-safeguarded nuclear power infrastructures. Many others have expressed interest in mechanisms to ensure reliable access to nuclear fuel. Development of a state's civil nuclear infrastructure is a serious investment that will not occur overnight, but we have seen over and over again the benefits of civil nuclear cooperation to states newly pursuing the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Mr. Chairman,
the United States was a pioneer of civil nuclear cooperation. In a dramatic speech made here in New York on December 8, 1953, President Eisenhower noted "the United States knows that peaceful power from atomic energy is no dream of the future." He called for a mobilization of experts "to apply atomic energy to the needs of agriculture, medicine, and other peaceful activities." "A special purpose," he noted, "would be to provide abundant electrical energy in the power-starved areas of the world." More than a decade before Article IV of the NPT was drafted, the former President announced that the United States "would be proud to take up with others the development of plans whereby such peaceful use of atomic energy would be expedited."

The years following President Eisenhower's landmark "Atoms for Peace" speech saw the secrets of the atom opened widely in promotion of its benevolent uses. The Atomic Energy Act of 1954 laid the foundation for civil nuclear cooperation between the United States and many other countries. By 1960, we had concluded nuclear cooperation agreements with 44 states.

Today, our commitment to expanding access to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy remains strong. We have worked in the past, as we continue today, to meet our NPT Article IV commitment to facilitate the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials, and scientific information for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, in a manner consistent with the obligations of all States Party under Articles I, II and III of the Treaty.
For example, Mr. Chairman, the U.S. has long promoted the use of nuclear techniques for medicine, agriculture, and industry. We have supported the IAEA’s programs to address the sterilization of tsetse flies and cancer therapy for human health. We have worked with partner countries to irradiate seeds to improve crop yields. We have developed effective means for the storage and ultimate disposal of radioactive industrial waste. The United States has also helped ensure the long-term safety and security of these applications through the provision of regulatory assistance.

In addition, the demand for civil nuclear power is growing around the world, including in many states new to this technology. We all look forward to the benefits of nuclear energy to help meet future energy needs, increase energy security, and contribute to economic growth and prosperity around the globe. To reach these benefits, we must continue to cooperate in order to overcome a series of important challenges.

For countries that choose to pursue nuclear energy, an immense national infrastructure is required. Experts say that a decade or more will be needed to establish the human resources, legal frameworks, and technical protocols required for safe, secure, and well-safeguarded nuclear power.

Our Government is working in many ways to help states develop this infrastructure. We are proud to be a major contributor to the IAEA’s technical cooperation fund, and have strongly supported the Agency’s infrastructure development program and the materials it has prepared to guide new entrants past key milestones to nuclear power. We have also been an active participant in the international forum established by the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership. Moreover, our technical agencies have ongoing bilateral programs in safety, security, and safeguards with more than 40 countries. Our experts from the Department of Energy, its National Nuclear Security Administration, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission are working every day with their counterparts worldwide on the development of the requisite infrastructure – such as human resources and regulatory frameworks – for responsible civil nuclear programs.

A necessary component of a sustainable civil nuclear infrastructure, Mr. Chairman, is a reliable source of nuclear fuel. Fortunately, the nuclear energy industry benefits from a reliable, dynamic, and well-functioning fuel market. Around the world today, more than 400 reactors are supplied through sound, long-term fuel contracts with a diverse set of vendors. For those that desire even greater assurance, the IAEA and many of its Member States are working to develop a set of complementary multilateral approaches to support states against the possibility of supply disruptions unrelated to nonproliferation obligations. The United States strongly supports these efforts and looks forward to progress on an international nuclear fuel bank taking shape under the guidance of the IAEA.

Greater assurance of nuclear fuel supply will increase access to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. It will allow states the peace of mind needed to dedicate finite resources to the infrastructure required to operate nuclear power plants, without the need to invest in the entire nuclear fuel cycle. This has nothing to do with denying countries’ the right to benefit from the
full use of peaceful nuclear energy. Rather, it will ensure that the expansion of civil nuclear energy will not undermine our shared non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament goals.

Moreover, as the peaceful uses of nuclear energy expand, a strong and robust IAEA safeguards system will provide additional assurances to all countries. From its inception, the vision of the NPT included cooperation on safeguards under the International Atomic Energy Agency. NPT Articles III and IV are two sides of one coin for the safe and secure use of civil nuclear energy.

Mr. Chairman,

as a pioneer in the field of civil nuclear cooperation, the United States remains ready to facilitate access worldwide to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The growing appetite for nuclear energy increases the need for safe, secure, and well-safeguarded civil nuclear infrastructures. The United States and many others have long-established mechanisms to foster civil nuclear cooperation, and we are striving to improve these to match the needs and desires of our partners. We are improving programs for infrastructure development. We are promoting sound multilateral fuel-cycle arrangements. We are working to improve international safeguards.

In the words of President Obama, the United States is committed to building “a new framework for civil nuclear cooperation, including an international fuel bank, so that countries can access peaceful power without increasing the risks of proliferation. That must be the right of every nation that renounces nuclear weapons, especially developing countries embarking on peaceful programs.”

As the United States recognized more than a half century ago, the atom holds great potential to further the well-being of humankind. Through civil nuclear cooperation, the United States will continue its best efforts to provide further access around the globe to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.