

**Statement by Kanat Saudabayev,
Director of the Nazarbayev Center,
at the International Conference on the
Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear
Weapons**

Oslo, March 4-5, 2013

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Dear Colleagues,

Allow me to thank the organizers for inviting me to this conference, the importance and urgency of which is hard to overestimate. This conference covers an issue that is very critical and sensitive to my people, who experienced in full, and still experience, the full gravity and consequences of nuclear weapons tests.

According to the United Nations, the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site in Kazakhstan was the location for almost a quarter of all nuclear weapons tests in the world since 1945. Their total number exceeded 2,000. From 1949 to 1989, 456 of them were carried out at Semipalatinsk, including more than 120 in the atmosphere. Their total destructive power was two and a half thousand times that of the atomic bomb which was dropped on Hiroshima.

As a result, the nuclear tests in Kazakhstan affected more than a million and a half people. They contaminated vast regions of the country, equal in size to the total area of Germany.

Despite the fierce resistance of the Soviet leadership and their military-industrial complex, President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, even before our country became an independent state, issued a decree, on Aug. 29, 1991, closing Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, the world's largest.

This historical fact, expressing the will of the people of Kazakhstan, is of great importance to world civilization. After the closure of the Semipalatinsk test site, thanks to the example of Kazakhstan and the actions of the world community other test sites in the world in Nevada, Lop Nor and Novaya Zemlya stopped their activities. The "nuclear club" powers signed on to the documents prohibiting nuclear tests, and committed themselves to adhere to the moratorium on further testing.

Over the years, the historical significance of this wise and courageous step by our President has become more and more obvious. Thus, since 2009, August

29, the anniversary of the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, has been declared by the United Nations as the International Day against Nuclear Tests.

As is known, at independence, Kazakhstan inherited a huge Soviet nuclear arsenal which included 1,040 nuclear warheads for intercontinental ballistic missiles and 370 nuclear warheads for cruise missiles carried on strategic bombers. This arsenal exceeded combined nuclear forces of Britain, France and China.

Thanks to the decision of President Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan not only closed the largest nuclear test site in the world, but it also expelled all nuclear weapons and their means of delivery from our country.

Throughout the years of independence Kazakhstan and its President have consistently confirmed their leadership in non-proliferation and disarmament. As you know, it was only last week in Almaty, that another round of talks on Iran's nuclear program took place, at the invitation of our President.

The talks in Almaty, which ended with an agreement to have further search of solutions at the level of experts in Istanbul and to carry out one more round of talks in Almaty on April 5-6 of this year, became a considerable step in building confidence and mutual understanding between the parties and in strengthening of the understanding of the need to solve this problem exclusively through peaceful, diplomatic means.

Kazakhstan was not a direct participant of the talks. However, our country created all conditions for their fruitful carrying out, and our head of state received co-chairs of the talks, Saeed Jalili, Secretary of Iran's Supreme Security Council, and Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and expressed his good wishes.

Even such small progress in this difficult negotiation process cannot but please all of us. Symbolically, it became possible on the Kazakh soil, in Almaty, where President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed the Decree on shutting down the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site on August 29, 1991. That historical act became a first step for humanity on the road to a nuclear weapons free world.

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

The nuclear tests that were carried out for four decades at the Semipalatinsk test site had a detrimental impact on the humanitarian, social and economic situation of the population and the environment.

The effects of those nuclear tests still negatively influence the health of people living near the site. Today, 70 percent of victims of nuclear weapons testing

are children and grandchildren of the people originally exposed to radiation fallout from those tests.

Since independence, the Government of Kazakhstan has been committed to the rehabilitation of the victims of nuclear tests and it has provided economic and social support to the population in the region. The government has adopted a number of targeted programmes aimed at addressing the problems of the Semipalatinsk region. Kazakhstan's Parliament has passed a law for the social protection of victims of nuclear tests.

With the assistance of the international community, Kazakhstan has organized an electronic data base of the personal records of the people affected by nuclear tests. Electronic registers have been created. Those listed receive privileges in obtaining medical care and treatments in their respective rehabilitation centres and hospitals, as well as other social benefits and payments.

To date, the register includes the passport and medical data for 194,124 individuals. Some 90 percent of them are from the East Kazakhstan region, and 10 percent are from the Pavlodar region. Every year, the Research Institute for Radiation Medicine and Ecology updates the register and expands the number recorded by about ten thousand people.

Severe environmental impacts have also been observed after the nuclear tests conducted at the Semipalatinsk site. The unique and diverse flora and fauna of the region suffered. Vast areas of land around the locations of the nuclear explosions are still not suitable for habitation or productive use.

According to UN data, the Government of Kazakhstan provided 600 million dollars in official aid to the Semipalatinsk region for the period from 1999 to 2010. However, the social, economic and environmental rehabilitation of the region still requires very serious and prolonged international assistance.

International public opinion has been sympathetic to the tragedy of our people. The UN General Assembly, in its Resolution No. 63/279 on April 25, 2009, called upon the global community to provide further support to Kazakhstan for the environmental, social, economic and humanitarian rehabilitation of the region.

From 1997 to 2009, the UN General Assembly adopted six such resolutions.

At the Tokyo International Conference on Semipalatinsk, organized by the Government of Japan and the UN Development Programme in 1999, the member states agreed on the feasibility of recruiting international donors, as well as organizing cooperative actions, to assist Kazakhstan in eliminating the consequences of nuclear tests, and helping to rehabilitate the population and the environment of the region.

The major donors to help the victims of Semipalatinsk nuclear tests have been the European Union, Japan, Britain, Norway, Switzerland, UNICEF, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the UN Development Programme, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Korea International Cooperation Agency, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Red Crescent Society of Kazakhstan and the Canadian International Development Agency.

In 2010, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) completed its project of assessing the territory of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site for its further economic use. There are plans for further cooperation between the IAEA and the Government of Kazakhstan on these issues in 2012-2015.

Since 1993, the United States has provided assistance to Kazakhstan to eliminate the effects of nuclear tests at the Semipalatinsk test site and to dismantle the nuclear weapons infrastructure that Kazakhstan inherited from the Soviet Union. It has also cooperated with Kazakhstan on implementing a number of defence measures within the Cooperative Threat Reduction programme, also known as the Nunn-Lugar programme, named after its initiators – American politicians Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar.

Kazakhstan is grateful to the international community for its assistance in eliminating the consequences of the Soviet nuclear tests, and in supporting the human and ecological rehabilitation of the region.

At the same time, the people of Kazakhstan look forward to the continuation and strengthening of targeted humanitarian assistance from the international community and above all, from all nuclear powers – the main participants in the global arms race, which caused such severe trials and tribulations to our people through the long decades of the Cold War. The Government of Kazakhstan and the world community as a whole have done a great deal to rehabilitate the victims of the nuclear tests and to restore the environment at the Semipalatinsk test site.

However, this problem is far from being resolved. We still require, and appreciate, humanitarian aid to assist the Government of Kazakhstan in its continuing efforts to overcome the effects of nuclear explosions and to ensure the economic growth and sustainable development of the Semipalatinsk region. We hope that the appeal of the UN General Assembly to its member-states to provide support to Kazakhstan in its efforts to rehabilitate the Semipalatinsk region will be heard by the leaders of all nations in the international community.

I would like to express confidence that this conference will once again remind of the victims of nuclear testing in the world and would encourage the governments of all countries to engage in a more active and tangible humanitarian

assistance in their rehabilitation, and the rehabilitation of environments that were contaminated by nuclear tests.

Thank you for your attention.