STATEMENT

by

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MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

New York, 22 September 2011
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor to address this High Level Meeting on Nuclear Security.

The Republic of Serbia believes that it is in the general interest of humanity to develop more stringent accountability and transparency mechanisms on the safe use of nuclear power.

In our view, states with such programs need to continuously review and improve their infrastructure and safety cultures. The constant danger of nuclear accidents postulates the critical importance of strengthening national emergency preparedness and response systems. This includes being able to provide timely, transparent and correct information to the public.

Serbia supports the central role of the International Atomic Energy Agency in strengthening the global nuclear safety regime. Its expertise and assistance remain universally respected. For this to remain the case, special care must keep being taken to ensure that its work is not subjected to undue politicization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia has taken a number of concrete steps to enhance nuclear security in the Western Balkans, by focusing on safe, civilian applications of atomic technology in fields such as medicine.

To further demonstrate our commitment, we recently signed the Additional Protocols to the Safeguard Agreement of the IAEA.

We have also adopted a Law on Ionizing Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety in order to completely harmonize our domestic legislation with the strictest international standards, including those deriving from our obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as the recommendations of both the IAEA and the European Commission. The aforementioned Law also established an independent National Nuclear Agency, which became fully operational in late 2010 and is responsible for regulatory controls and enforcement.

Serbia is nearing the end of preparations to adhere to the Convention on Nuclear Safety and to the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and Radioactive Waste Management. The IAEA has recognized and participated in our dedicated capacity building efforts. It has also supported our projects to enhance nuclear safety infrastructure, including in the field of radiation protection.

I draw your attention to one such project, which we completed last December. It successfully transferred 48 kg of irradiated, eighty-percent enriched uranium from Serbia to the Russian Federation for safe storage. This multi-year program called VIND, or Viniča Institute Nuclear Decommissioning, was supported by Russia, the European Union, and the United States. As the IAEA’s Technical Cooperation Department has stated, VIND is a model contemporary
example of multilateral cooperation in three crucial fields of interest: one, spent fuel removal; two, low- and intermediate-level radioactive waste management; and three, large-scale facility decommissioning.

We would be prepared to share our know-how with countries that might be in a position to benefit from our VIND experience.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to once again express Serbia’s sympathy, solidarity and support for the people of Japan over the March 11th, 2011, devastating earthquake and tsunami, as well as over the consequences of the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

We greatly appreciate Japan’s commitment to share the lessons learned from this disaster. Fukushima should remind us all of the critical importance of thoroughly reviewing nuclear safety standards—both at national and international levels. We remain confident that the IAEA will continue to play a central role in this aspect of the nuclear security issue as well.

Before coming to the end of my remarks, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate Serbia’s longstanding position on the critical importance of enhancing global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts through the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which we believe must be complemented by the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty once it comes into force. Talks should also intensify for concluding a treaty on fissile materials.

The NPT’s lack of universality also requires our concerted attention, as does the threat posed by non-state actors acquiring weapons-grade material. The NPT as originally envisioned does not adequately address this grave danger to international peace and stability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sixty-six years ago, Fat Man and Little Boy showed the world the terrible damage a weapon of mass destruction could wreak on civilian targets. Twenty-five years ago, Chernobyl taught us that nuclear accidents respect no borders. Earlier this year, Fukushima brought to light the emerging nexus between natural disasters and nuclear safety.

As we begin to look ahead to next year’s Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, South Korea, let us our future actions be guided by the words of Albert Einstein, spoken at the dawn of the nuclear age he helped to unleash: “through the release of atomic energy, our generation has brought into the world the most revolutionary force since prehistoric man’s discovery of fire.”

That truth endures today. It is up to us, working together, in partnership, to determine whether in the 21st century, this revolutionary force will be used for peace and prosperity, or death and destruction.

Thank you very much for your attention.