

Kazakhstan's Nuclear-Free status

On obtaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan inherited a major arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, including 1,216 nuclear warheads for intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear reserves for strategic bombers. Kazakhstan's inherited nuclear arsenal exceeded those of the United Kingdom, China and France put together and it was enough to destroy everything alive on Earth completely.

Aside from the stockpiled nuclear weapons, Kazakhstan had the necessary infrastructure and resource basis for the production of the active components of nuclear weapons. In particular, Kazakhstan accounts for 21% of global proven uranium reserves. In addition, Kazakhstan had the world's second largest nuclear testing potential.

With such nuclear capabilities, Kazakhstan attracted attention from global geopolitical centres immediately, especially when in the early 1990s, despite the complicated economic situation, the country could afford to preserve a small amount of nuclear weapons in its warehouses. Discussions on the need to preserve nuclear potential preoccupied Kazakh society in order to guarantee security and deter the ambitions of potential foes.

Now, it is hard to even imagine what negative effect our country's decision to obtain the status of nuclear power would have had. We have to pay tribute to the wisdom of the Kazakh leaders who withstood pressure from local hawks and did not give in to the temptation to show their nuclear ambitions.

On 29 August 1991 President Nazarbayev signed a historical decree to shut down the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground. Later Kazakhstan joined the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty I, and the Kazakh parliament ratified the Lisbon protocol in July 1992 and the *Treaty* on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in December 1993. Kazakhstan joined the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in September 1996.

Kazakhstan was the first country in the CIS to withdraw all nuclear weapons from its territory, and the last nuclear warhead that remained underground at the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground on 27 May 1995. Since then Kazakh land has been fully free of nuclear weapons.

Kazakhstan's decision on voluntary give-up of the status of nuclear power based on the principles of humanism was an unprecedented and absolutely new step in building civilized interstate relations.

Following this, US Senator Richard Lugar speaking at a conference in Washington on 22 February 2003 stated that Kazakhstan's wise and bold choice to give up nuclear weapons was in striking contrast to events in India, Pakistan, North Korea and Iran, which is why the world should particularly value the policy adopted by Kazakhstan. He noted that if the international community were to look for success stories in this sphere, it was sufficient to turn to Kazakhstan's example.