

Statement by H.E. Eric Danon Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France to the Conference on Disarmament Head of the French Delegation

"Chapter 3"

(New York, 8th May 2009)

Mr. Chairman,

1. The French Delegation first of all wishes to associate itself with the declaration made by the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Chairman,

2. The facts are there for all to see. Global warming is threatening our planet, reserves of fossil fuels are becoming scarce and many countries are becoming increasingly concerned over their energy security. Renewable energies do not appear sufficient to meet the growing energy needs that can be seen throughout the world to ensure the economic development of the emerging countries. Nuclear energy is now becoming more widely accepted as an integral part of the energy mix able to meet that demand by offering a widely available, cost effective energy which is based on proven and environmentally-friendly technology.

3. Nuclear energy has an essential contribution to make to sustainable development : in the fields of health, food supply and agriculture, access to water and energy and protection of the environment.

4. In 1974, France opted to rely predominantly on nuclear energy for its electricity production. Today, 58 reactors installed in France produce 80% of our electricity. This allows us greater independence and the security of our energy supply while limiting our emissions of greenhouse gases. Although it is the fourth largest consumer of energy among the OECD countries, France is ranked just 27th for CO2 emissions per GDP unit. Its CO2 emissions are 30-40% less per capita than its major European neighbors. With its control of the whole nuclear cycle and its third generation reactor, of which the construction of a second example has been approved by the French President, France has all the expertise necessary to assist countries wishing to develop nuclear-power capacities.

5. For more than 30 years now, France has pursued a responsible energy policy and has developed major facilities designed to overcome the challenges of radioactive waste management. France is continuing its efforts in the field of research with the new research reactor, the Jules Horowitz Reactor (RZH), which will be built on the Cadarache site. It also envisages the roll-out by 2020 of a fast neutron reactor, liable to further increase the energy potential of nuclear material and which could bring innovative solutions for the efficient processing of minor actinides which are the most serious contributors to the toxicity and life duration of ultimate waste.

6. Worried about their energy security and cautious about sustainable development, more and more States are showing interest for nuclear energy. We cannot ignore this urgent and legitimate demand. The international community must respond to it, while removing the risk of proliferation associated in particular with the nuclear fuel cycle. This is a major challenge for the present NPT Review Cycle.

7. In an address to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change on September 24th, 2007, the French President emphasized that : "France is ready to help any country wishing to acquire civil nuclear energy. We can't have an energy for the future for the Western countries and have Oriental countries which can't get access to it."

8. At a time when more and more countries wish to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, France, in accordance with the commitments it has undertaken in Article IV, is ready to respond to these needs by making available its recognized expertise to any country which scrupulously observes the whole of its nuclear non-proliferation commitments and in particular those resulting from the NPT. My country is in fact convinced that the responsible development of civil nuclear energy, with full observance of the highest standards of safety, security and non-proliferation, will contribute to implementation of the NPT and strengthen the legitimacy of the non-proliferation regime.

9. France intends to share its experience in this field. In this respect, France pays particular attention to the requirements expressed by developing countries. France has signed several bilateral cooperation agreements in the field of peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Such agreements form the legal framework required for any long-term partnership and set out the conditions for cooperation in detail, particularly those relating to application of the highest international standards in terms of safety, security and non-proliferation.

10. These agreements cover all geographical areas. The most recent agreements were signed with developing countries, particularly in the North Africa – Middle East region. In fact, the Delegations will find an information book on France's actions in favour of development of peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

11. In parallel with its bilateral partnerships, France plays an active role in collective international co-operation projects in the field of civil nuclear energy.

12. France considers that international cooperation is essential for the design of a new generation of safer, more competitive reactors, which will be more resistant to proliferation and generate less long-term radioactive waste.

13. It is a member of the Generation IV International Forum, in which it currently acts as Chair, and is also a member of the IAEA's International Project on Innovative Nuclear Reactors and Fuel Cycles (INPRO). It is also an active participant in the GNEP (Global Nuclear Energy Partnership) initiative, having organized the most recent ministerial conference in October 2008 in Paris.

14. My country takes part in the Multinational Design Evaluation Programme (MDEP), which aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the safety evaluation procedure when reviewing new power reactor designs.

15. France has always attached a great deal of importance to the promotion of the IAEA and strongly supports the technical cooperation programme. This commitment manifests itself in the form of the hosting of trainees and training programmes, in particular in the field of radiation protection. France also directly funds large-scale projects and French specialists contribute to expert missions in many fields.

16. Nuclear can only grow in confidence. That is the reason why we should be vigilant in order to assure that it will develop in a responsible manner, with the best conditions of non-proliferation, security and safety. This goal is shared by the European Union which presents, during this preparatory committee, an ambitious and concrete action plan for assuring a responsible development of nuclear energy. France is bringing its full support to this action plan.

17. First of all, we should be particularly vigilant of any abuses of this right, recognized by Article IV, by States which do not pursue in good faith the objectives in compliance with the Treaty.

18. While the Treaty recognizes the unalienable right of States to develop peaceful uses of nuclear energy, this right is not without conditions. In the very terms of the Treaty, its exercise is conditioned by peaceful purposes, which respect commitments to non-proliferation and satisfactory implementation of the IAEA safeguards.

19. A State which fails to meet its obligations in respect of non-proliferation and the implementation of IAEA safeguards, or for which the peaceful aims of nuclear activities cannot be established, shall not be able to invoke the stipulations of Article IV. Thus, a State which develops sensitive nuclear cycle activities which are not economically viable and without any real justification for its nuclear-power programme would be subject to strong suspicions concerning the true aims of its nuclear programme. The right to peaceful use should not be circumvented in order to use nuclear technologies, equipment or material for purposes contrary to the aims of the Treaty.

20. Fortunately, the fifty year history of the NPT shows us that, for the vast majority of the States party to the Treaty, particularly developing States, the question of respect of the NPT, or that of peaceful aims, does not arise. In order that the rights of this vast majority of States are not called into question, the international community must respond without weakness to those who fail to observe the common rule.

Mr. Chairman,

21. In spite of all this, however, we cannot ignore the fact that the proliferation crises which have occurred in North Korea and Iran, resulting from violation of the obligations of the Treaty by these two States, have shaken the confidence of the international community. These conditions of confidence must be re-established in order to ensure the full and complete application of Article IV. This means the resolution of the Iranian and North Korean crises, which must be settled as a matter of the utmost urgency.

Mr. Chairman,

22. The development of nuclear energy presents critical challenges for our collective security. To ensure the security of all States, we must promote the responsible development of civil nuclear energy in a multilateral, transparent and stringent framework, based on consolidated international cooperation which guarantees that sensitive technologies and goods are not used for anything other than peaceful purposes.

23. This is not a question of choosing between development of nuclear energy and respect of non-proliferation obligations. Far from being antagonistic, these two pillars of the NPT are designed to mutually reinforce one another to allow the largest number possible to benefit from the possibilities of nuclear energy while guaranteeing collective security.

24. The philosophy of the international safeguards is based on a simple premise : the easier access to quality materials is made, the greater the risk of proliferation and therefore the more the international community must be vigilant in the dissemination of these technologies which, by their very nature, carry a greater risk.

25. In this respect, I would remind you that all the recent proliferation crises were due to the use of upstream (enrichment) or downstream (reprocessing) technologies of the fuel cycle. Because of this, the export of these most sensitive technologies, since they can be used for both civil and military ends, must meet the strictest criteria. This is what France has been proposing for several years within non-proliferation forums. We are not talking here about preventing the export of these technologies, rather of enabling their export by supervising it.

26. This is also the thinking behind our nuclear export policy. France has defined a clear policy regarding the export of sensitive technologies : this distinguishes between, on the one hand, the supply of reactors based on non-proliferating technologies (light water reactors) and on the other hand, the supply of the fuel required for the operation and the export of enrichment and reprocessing cycle technologies. France undertakes to export these sensitive technologies only under particular circumstances that are economically and technically justified for the beneficiary countries and which present no risk of weakening the international non-proliferation regime.

27. At the same time, we would like to promote credible alternatives to the development of national capacities for the enrichment and reprocessing which any State that hopes to develop a nuclear-power programme must be able to call upon. The international initiatives which have been proposed throughout the last few years are designed to respond to this need for guaranteeing permanent access to these markets. As such, we can congratulate ourselves that on December 8th of last year, under the French presidency, the Council of the European Union took the decision to contribute the sum of €25M to the setting up of a "fuel bank" under the auspices of the IAEA and on condition of the decision by the Board of Governors.

28. I would also remind you that France wishes to see the universal application of the additional protocol, now adopted by more than 90 countries, which gives increased powers to the IAEA in its mission of verifying the nuclear activities of different States.

Mr. Chairman,

29. Our security also depends on the ability of those States which have chosen civil nuclear energy to carry out their projects in compliance with the most exacting safety and security conditions.

30. It is vital, for continued nuclear development, to maintain a high level of safety. France reiterates the importance which it attaches to the Convention on nuclear safety as well as to the Common convention on safety of spent fuel management and safety of radioactive waste management. As regards transport safety, France maintains a continuous dialogue with its partners and the coastal States concerned, together with consultations aimed at improving mutual understanding and confidence with respect to the safety of maritime transport of radioactive material.

31. In particular, France intends to help countries that wish to acquire nuclear-power capabilities to implement the framework and infrastructures necessary for the safe and efficient development of nuclear energy. We must be aware that commitment to a civil nuclear programme is a long-term choice, which requires a suitable environment and therefore implies a special responsibility on behalf of the States concerned.

32. Furthermore, France has set up a specialist body, the AFNI (Agence France Nucléaire International - French International Nuclear Agency), to assist countries in gaining access to nuclear energy with the implementation of the infrastructures necessary for the safe and efficient development of civil nuclear energy, with priority given to the training and development of human resources in the nuclear field. To this end, and in the interests of maximum efficiency, the French authorities intend, in direct collaboration with the IAEA, to harmonize as much as possible the bilateral cooperation and multilateral aid the Agency offers in compliance with its statute.

Mr. Chairman,

33. The final requirement is that of transparency. Nuclear development cannot be envisaged without political will and the backing of citizens. For its part, my country is determined to pursue the work of transparency which it has already begun. In application of our international commitments, the export of nuclear material is subject to government authorization. France intends to develop its international cooperation in complete transparency, while strictly complying with its international obligations. In accordance with the terms of the EURATOM Treaty, our agreements are subject to approval from the European Commission and, once ratified, they are published. Their contents are therefore in the public domain.

34. Concerning nuclear materials, France is a member of the group of countries which are signatories to guidelines adopted concerning the management of civil plutonium and in this respect publishes the status of its civil stocks of material each year. My country is also convinced that the management of civil stocks of highly enriched uranium would be improved by the adoption of similar guidelines.

Mr. Chairman,

35. The development of nuclear energy will be one of the outstanding achievements of this century. We must work together, as of now, to promote the responsible development of nuclear energy which will enable the community of nations to provide answers to the formidable economic, human and environmental challenges which lie ahead.

36. This development is tied to the creation of a climate of trust between all participants. To achieve this, guarantees are necessary on the four foundations on which this challenge rests : pursuing a peaceful programme in good faith, compliance with the commitments of non-proliferation, a very high level of safety and security and, finally, the utmost transparency.

37. Only the implementation of large-scale international cooperation in a climate of confidence and transparency will enable the greatest possible number of countries to benefit from the peaceful applications of this energy of the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,