

Kazakhstan shows denuclearization works

By H.E. Erlan Idrissov, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan
Originally published in Global Times, 8th October 2016



If you read a major newspaper anywhere around the world, you will know how there are almost daily stories about international concerns over countries that are attempting to develop the ability to create nuclear weaponry.

It is widely reported how the international community expresses its concern every time an underground test takes place, or rockets are fired into the sky.

What you are highly unlikely to read about is a nation that willingly and unilaterally relinquished its own atomic arsenal.

It might surprise a lot of people to learn that my country, Kazakhstan, did exactly that nearly a quarter of a century ago.

The Kazakh people are well aware of the horrors of nuclear weaponry. The Soviet Union's Semipalatinsk test site was situated on our own soil.

Hundreds of tests took place with little or no regard for the well-being of our people. Vast areas of our country became uninhabitable. Many of our people still bear the scars of the horrors of those dreadful times.

Since gaining independence in 1991, one of our first acts was to decommission our nuclear arsenal, the world's fourth largest at that time. We also shut down the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. Ever since, we have been a steadfast champion for nuclear non-proliferation.

This year, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of our nation. I believe our partner countries around the world should look closely at the concrete steps we've made to help make our region and the wider world a safer place.

In 2009, Kazakhstan together with our four neighbors in the region established, by the Treaty of Semipalatinsk, the Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. Following its success, we are urging progress on launching a similar zone in the Middle East.

In 2012, Kazakhstan launched The ATOM (Abolish Testing. Our Mission) Project, an international education and advocacy campaign seeking to galvanize global public opinion against nuclear weapon testing and, ultimately, nuclear weapons. Already, more

than 300,000 people from more than 100 countries have supported its call.

Last year we signed a host country agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to establish a low-enriched uranium bank in our country. This is the first ever bank of this type and it will provide the world with a guaranteed supply of the fuel for civic nuclear energy, thus making an important contribution to strengthening the non-proliferation regime.

Given our proven background and expertise in non-proliferation, we watch efforts made by our neighbors with interest. In particular, initiatives for denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, supported by its biggest neighbors, China and Russia, should be watched closely.

Kazakhstan is, of course, also very alarmed by the recent nuclear tests carried out by North Korea. We strongly believe these tests to be a clear violation of its international obligations and we urge Pyongyang to stop conducting further nuclear tests. In order to prevent a nuclear disaster, it is crucial to fully comply with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and to take concrete steps toward denuclearization. We urge North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions and return to the six-party talks negotiations involving the US, China, Russia, South Korea and Japan.

Destroying our nuclear weaponry was not intended to, nor has it, reduced our ability to defend ourselves. Kazakhstan contributed to creating a Central Asia free from nuclear weapons and thanks to our multi-vector foreign policy and good relations with all our neighbors and partners, remote and close, we have demonstrated that the possession of nuclear weapons is not necessary to ensure national security.

Kazakhstan starts its two-year seat on the UN Security Council in January. This is the first time a Central Asian country has held the position. It is with our experience in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation that we look forward to taking up our responsibility to the world.

The author is foreign minister of Kazakhstan. opinion@globaltimes.com.cn Follow us on Twitter @GTopinion