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COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

Letter dated 29 July 1988 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the
Permanent Mission of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to
the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of replies given on 30 June 1988 by Mr. Nikolai Ryzhkov, the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, to questions from a TASS correspondent in connection with the twentieth anniversary of the opening for signature of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

* A/43/150.

I should be grateful if you would have that text circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under items 52, 53, 57, 58, 64, 67 and 73 of the provisional agenda.

V. LOSINSKIY

ANNEX

Replies given on 30 June 1988 by the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers to questions from a TASS correspondent in connection with the twentieth anniversary, on 1 July 1988, of the opening for signature of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

Question

Together with the Governments of the United States and Great Britain, the Soviet Government is one of the depositaries of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. What is your assessment of the main effects of the Treaty over its 20 years of existence and its place in the structure of modern international relations?

Answer

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is among the first in the history of international treaties to control nuclear weapons. It has turned out to be an important element in the protection of international security and strategic stability.

First and foremost, the Treaty erected a formidable international legal barrier against a very serious potential danger - that a large group of States would acquire nuclear weapons, which would without question have been likely to overload the entire structure of international relations and increase the number of crises, clashes and plain unfortunate accidents of every description, never mind the fact that the spread of nuclear weapons could have turned into a chain reaction like that on which the weapons themselves are based. And that when a great many countries had reached a level in their scientific and technical development where they could have built a bomb at will.

Mankind realized that the proliferation of nuclear weapons posed a threat to all, which had to be met with an appropriate collective response.

For many countries, this meant weighing up carefully, in political terms, considerations of their national prestige, their strategic interests and designs, and the need to achieve security.

In his article "Realities and guarantees for a secure world", the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, called the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons "a unique example of the high sense of responsibility of states".

A high sense of responsibility for the fate of our planet was shown not but both by the nuclear and the non-nuclear States, the former committing themselves not to encourage the proliferation of nuclear weapons by any means whatsoever, and to pursue negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament, the latter voluntarily renouncing the acquisition of nuclear weapons by any means. The signing of the Treaty which set out these commitments was a demonstration of great political realism.

Today, the principles of non-proliferation established in the Treaty are widely recognized and have become an integral part of the foundations of modern international law. It is no coincidence that, among international legal instruments on arms control, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is the one with the largest number of signatories and adherents - 136 States.

The history of the Non-Proliferation Treaty confirms its effectiveness. The international nuclear non-proliferation régime that has grown up around the Treaty, including the system of safeguards (monitoring) operated by the International Atomic Energy Agency, understandings on the principles governing exports of nuclear material, and the now established institution of bilateral and multilateral consultations among parties to the Treaty, is convincing evidence that the international community has a genuine interest in upholding and strengthening the basic edifice. The Soviet Union contributes significantly to the maintenance of the non-proliferation régime, adhering strictly to its obligations under the Treaty and abiding steadfastly by the rules governing the export of nuclear material.

The role played by IAEA, to which the Treaty assigns monitoring responsibilities, and which has developed a system of safeguards which effectively and reliably prevents the diversion of nuclear materials from peaceful uses to the manufacture of nuclear weapons, deserves special acknowledgement. The monitoring is carried out with full respect for the sovereign rights of States and without impinging on the development of their peaceful nuclear activities or international co-operation in the peaceful uses of atomic energy.

Further evidence that the idea of nuclear non-proliferation enjoys broad international acceptance is the fact that countries which are not party to the Treaty itself do not generally act counter to the principles it lays down, and in fact adapt their policies and trading and economic activities to suit them. Thus the principles could be said to be universal in their application.

True, among the countries not party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty there are some that make little secret of their nuclear ambitions. Chief among these are Israel and South Africa, whose position on this question undeniably complicates the already difficult situation in the Middle East and southern Africa. It is high time the Israeli and South African authorities recognized that a nuclear future is not what their countries need, and that adhering to the Non-Proliferation Treaty is the only choice which reason, ethics and a sense of responsibility, if only towards their own peoples, will allow.

Question

How, today, do you see the future of the Treaty, in particular in relation to the task of ridding the world of nuclear weapons entirely?

Answer

For the majority of States, the Treaty already symbolizes the viability of a peaceful alternative to the military use of nuclear energy. As we see it, the ultimate aim is that this should be the rule for all States. One frequent argument against nuclear disarmament is that, having once invented nuclear weapons, mankind

cannot unlearn how to make them. Maybe so. But to go with the Treaty there is an entire set of machinery designed to prevent nuclear technology from being implemented in weapons manufacture. In particular, we believe, there is every reason to draw on our experience with the IAEA safeguards in designing a verification system for future nuclear disarmament measures.

The twentieth anniversary of the Treaty comes at a time of major events in the world community. The new political thinking, reflecting the current needs and imperatives of today's world, was given concrete form in a programme proposed by the Soviet Union for the stage-by-stage elimination of nuclear weapons. Today we are witnessing the first real results of its practical application. I have in mind, first, the conclusion of the INF Treaty, the significant progress made towards an agreement on 50-per-cent reductions in Soviet and United States strategic offensive weapons, and the Soviet-American talks on the limitation and eventual prohibition of nuclear tests. There have been positive moves in many other areas of international life. And the commitment made by every party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty - to engage in talks on effective means of limiting the arms race and on nuclear disarmament under strict and effective control - is very much to the point today.

Without question, one essential condition for a steady, uninterrupted nuclear disarmament process, which is only now beginning, is the maintenance and strengthening of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Soviet Union will continue to take a position of resolute support for the Treaty, which must remain in effect until a nuclear- and violence-free world has become a reality. The only thing that can take its place is a comprehensive international treaty prohibiting the re-emergence of nuclear weapons once they have been completely and finally eliminated.
