

**Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
“Global Nuclear Detection Architecture: Are We Building Domestic Defenses That Will
Make the Nation Safer From Nuclear Terrorism?”**

Washington, DC

July 16, 2008

Good morning and welcome to this sixth in a series of hearings held by this committee to examine the threats and challenges posed by nuclear terrorism and what our government is doing to protect us from it.

In previous hearings we’ve examined our state of preparedness were there to be a nuclear detonation in a major city: Who would help the local first responders who presumably would be clearly overwhelmed? What kind of follow-up medical response capabilities does our nation have to treat the wounded that will certainly run into the thousands, or even hundreds of thousands? Do we have clear communication strategies to let the public know exactly what they need to do to protect themselves after an attack – should they move or shelter in place, for example?

In all these areas we found we have much work to do. A lot of work is being done to protect the American people but we have a lot

more to do before we can rest easy, or approximate anything like resting easy.

But our first priority is to prevent terrorists from obtaining the means of attacking us with nuclear weapons in the first place.

Consequently, with today's hearing – the first one Congress has held on the global nuclear detection architecture – we will review the federal government's efforts to detect and thwart trafficking in nuclear materials so the terrorists either never get their hands on a nuclear weapon, or if they do, we make sure they are blocked from getting into the United States.

The danger of terrorists acquiring a nuclear weapon is real. Between 1993 and 2006 there were 1,080 confirmed incidents of illicit trafficking in nuclear materials. Eighteen of these cases involved weapons-grade materials and another 124 involved material capable of making a so-called "dirty bomb" that would use conventional explosives to spread nuclear material.

The Domestic Nuclear Detection Office - better known as DNDO - is charged with designing the nuclear detection architecture to protect us from this threat. It is a multi-agency effort which was created by a Presidential directive in April 2005 and housed within the Department of Homeland Security.

As we will hear from our witnesses, the responsibilities of the DNDO are daunting. Its' first job was to perform an inventory of the 74 different federal programs spread over the Department of Energy (DOE), the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Department of State and try to create from these a unified system where all these different agencies and programs worked together in concert.

The reach of these programs is wide and layered, including efforts abroad, at the border and within our homeland. Many of these programs predate the establishment of the DNDO.

Last fiscal year these programs cost a total of \$2.8 billion – \$1.1 billion to combat smuggling and secure nuclear materials held

abroad, \$220 million to detect materials at the border, \$900 million for detection efforts within the United States, and \$575 million for cross-cutting activities that support many of the other programs, like research and development, into detection technologies.

The goal of a layered system is that each point of the system will offer another opportunity to detect and thwart terrorists before they can acquire a nuclear weapon or detect and stop them before it can be smuggled it into the United States.

But the system we have in place now, I conclude, is not complete. As we will hear today, our global nuclear detection architecture – this “system of systems,” as one of our witnesses calls it – may have both needless redundancies and/or dangerous gaps, which in this case is the worst of both worlds. Even if each program was working precisely as planned, holes may exist in this layered security net that could allow determined terrorists to get their hands on weapons grade nuclear material and bring it into the United States.

DNDO's job is to find and help plug these gaps. But that job is made significantly more difficult by the fact that DNDO is just a coordinating agency and has no effective power to implement desired changes.

DNDO has no authority to alter the spending requests for programs that are critical to the architecture and little ability to ensure that money is spent efficiently and contributes to the overall contours of the architecture DNDO has designed.

Therefore, we're at a point where we must ask whether or not DNDO needs authority to review the budgets and plans of the participating agencies as well as make sure the billions of dollars we have spent and will spend are spent wisely.

I look forward to our witness's testimony. The challenges posed by terrorists armed with nuclear weapons are critical to the safety of our nation and nothing is more important than ensuring that our nation's efforts to prevent it are effective. We look to you for guidance on any legislation you would recommend.

Senator Collins?