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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, January 30, 2002

Energy Secretary Abraham Announces Nuclear Nonproliferation Effort with Kazakhstan for Former Soviet Nuclear Weapons Facility

WASHINGTON, DC -- Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham today launched an ambitious nuclear nonproliferation effort with the Republic of Kazakhstan and private U.S. industry. In support of President Bush's National Energy Policy, the initiative will improve the nation's energy security, bolster the global economy, and enhance international cooperation.

"The project at the Ulba Metallurgical Plant in Kazakhstan is a concrete example of how our nuclear nonproliferation programs can facilitate important industry initiatives to improve both U.S. energy security and national security," Secretary Abraham said. "Additionally, today's initiative will enhance our relationship with an important international partner and improve global energy supplies as well."

Under the project, a former nuclear weapons plant in Kazakhstan will develop its capability to separate low-enriched uranium from uranium concentrates with assistance from two private U.S. companies and Brookhaven National Laboratory. The uranium will then be made available as a power source to civilian power reactors throughout the world. The Department of Energy's (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) brought the parties together and will continue to assist with the project. The endeavor will immediately create 50 new civilian jobs for former nuclear weapons scientists in Kazakhstan and will create hundreds of additional jobs for former nuclear weapons workers in the coming years.

This new project signals an increase in security cooperation between the United States and the Republic of Kazakhstan and their joint efforts to further secure nuclear materials and nuclear weapons knowledge. Kazakhstan, which inherited the world's fourth-largest nuclear weapons arsenal after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, decided to terminate its nuclear program and joined the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear state. Kazakhstan has dismantled and removed all nuclear weapons from its territory and has destroyed the associated infrastructure.

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R-02-012

Global Nuclear Fuel-Americas (GNF) of Wilmington, N.C., and RWE Nukem of Danbury, Conn., will assist the Ulba plant in Oskemen, Kazakhstan, to use its advanced solvent extraction technology to recover low-enriched uranium from uranium concentrates. DOE/NNSA has committed \$1.2 million in Initiatives for Proliferation Prevention (IPP) funds over three years for joint work between Ulba and Brookhaven National Laboratory to design and install this technology for commercial use.

The recovered uranium will be available to GNF and other commercial nuclear fuel manufacturers for use in Boiling Water Reactors. The U.S. industry partners have already matched the NNSA's contribution.

Secretary Abraham was joined by U.S. Rep. Curt Weldon (R-PA), Kazakh Ambassador Kanat B. Saudabayev, GNF President & CEO Jack Fuller, RWE Nukem President & CEO Jim Cornell, Brookhaven National Laboratory Deputy Director Thomas Sheridan, KazAtomProm President Askar Kasabekov, and Ulba Director Vitaly Khadeyev for the announcement.

The NNSA's IPP program helps engage former Soviet experts in the field of weapons of mass destruction in the development of commercial technologies for peaceful purposes. Both GNF and RWE Nukem are members of the U.S. Industry Coalition (USIC), a non-profit association of companies and universities that are active partners in the NNSA-IPP program. USIC works to facilitate technology commercialization for its members.