



Overcoming Nuclear Dangers

**Co-sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
the Nuclear Security Project and The World Political Forum**

16-17 April 2009 - MFA - Rome, Italy

INTRODUCTIVE REMARKS by MINISTER FRANCO FRATTINI

(fa fede solo il testo effettivamente pronunciato)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

First of all, I would like to thank the Nuclear Threat Initiative, the Nuclear Security Project and the World Political Forum, as well as my own Ministry's staff, for organizing this Conference. I am particularly grateful to President Gorbachev, the Honourable George Shultz, Sam Nunn and William Perry for being with us on this occasion and for their bold initiative to re-launch the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, which actually paved the way for this Conference.

Let me also welcome and thank all of our highly distinguished panelists for the outstanding contribution they will provide to our debate.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to open this landmark event together with President Gorbachev and the Honourable George Shultz, whose huge contribution to the cause of peace and nuclear disarmament brings our memory back to the Reykjavik Summit, when the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons began to take shape.

Back in 1986, two letters, one by President Gorbachev and the reply by President Reagan, paved the way to the Summit, which at the time was considered a failure but led, an year later, to the signing of the US – Soviet Treaty on banning Intermediate range Nuclear Forces, which brought about the elimination of a whole class of ballistic missiles.

For the first time, at the height of the Cold War, the leaders of the two superpowers spoke openly and sincerely about a world without nuclear weapons.

In 1991, the landmark START Treaty was signed. Unilateral reductions of non-strategic nuclear weapons followed and, in 1996, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty was signed. It has still to enter into force.

Excellencies,

Two years ago, four “wise men”: Mr Shultz, Mr Kissinger, Mr Nunn and Mr Perry, all leading policymakers, rekindled the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, suggesting some of the steps to be taken to reach this goal.

They were joined, in their call, by other statesmen and policymakers, including, in my country, Mr Fini, Mr D’Alema, Mr Parisi, Mr La Malfa and Mr Calogero, who stressed the need to spread a new way of thinking, a kind of a new “shared wisdom”.

This “wisdom” is now widely shared and has been subscribed to, a couple of weeks ago, by both President Obama and President Medvedev in their joint statement. President Obama confirmed his vision in the historical speech made last week in Prague.

A world free of nuclear weapons has been a longstanding aspiration of my country’s too, even during the Cold War. To set the historical record straight, Italy accepted to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) on the assumption that nuclear weapons States, in the long term, would meet their commitment to nuclear disarmament. Furthermore, Italy recognizes as nuclear weapons States only those who meet the conditions set by Art IX of the Treaty.

Although the NPT did not prescribe any timetable for nuclear disarmament, it did contain a solemn commitment not just to reduce the nuclear threat, by non proliferation means, but ultimately to get rid of it.

In order to achieve this vision, however, we have to reach consensus, as highlighted by the “four wise men”, on the importance of “reversing reliance on nuclear weapons globally as a vital contribution to preventing their proliferation into potentially dangerous hands, and ultimately ending them as a threat to the world”.

We should join in a common endeavour, both nuclear and non-nuclear weapons States, in order to make significant progress in this direction, with a view to the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

Essentially, we should consider some near-term steps to reduce urgent nuclear threats such as: deep reductions and changes to declaratory policies by nuclear weapons states; addressing the safe and secure expansion of nuclear energy; strengthening the security of nuclear materials.

In this connection, we emphasize the importance of securing global nuclear materials and of human engagement programmes, including both the re-direction of scientists from military to civil activities and the promotion of awareness of proliferation challenges.

Italy continues to regard the NPT as the cornerstone of the global non proliferation regime and the essential foundation of the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. Therefore, we pay special attention to the preparation of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, and we are working hard, together with our EU partners, for a successful outcome.

At the same time, we consider the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as an essential part of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. In his speech of April 5th in Prague, President Obama stated that “...my administration will immediately and aggressively pursue US ratification of the CTBT...”. We welcome President Obama’s commitment towards the ratification of the Treaty and are willing to support his efforts.

In the same vein, Italy has long been striving, within the Conference on Disarmament, for the negotiation of a Treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices (FMCT).

If the CTBT has long been regarded as the qualitative element of nuclear disarmament and non proliferation, the FMCT represents the next logical step as it deals with the quantitative dimension. Partly thanks to Italy's commitment, major opportunities have recently opened up to begin such negotiations within the Geneva Conference on Disarmament. In this regard, US readiness to negotiate an internationally verifiable FMCT can be considered a turning point.

Moreover, Italy is advocating the universalisation of the IAEA's Additional Protocol to the safeguards agreements, considering its importance for the purposes of strengthening the Agency's verification capabilities. In view of technological developments it is essential for the Protocols, together with the comprehensive safeguards agreements, to be the standard for verification.

In the programme of the G-8 Presidency we have given a high priority to the promotion of these three measures.

The European Security Strategy, which was adopted in 2003 during the Italian Presidency of the Union, puts a clear emphasis on Weapons of Mass Destruction proliferation as "potentially the greatest threat to our security".

Unfortunately, this assessment is still valid today after North Korea tested a nuclear device, Iran is still suspected to be developing nuclear weapons, an IAEA investigation on the alleged construction of a covert nuclear facility in Syria is underway, and the risk that terrorists may acquire weapons of mass destruction of their own remains high.

Excellencies,

Italy is not the only country embarking on a civil nuclear programme to meet its growing energy needs. According to the IAEA, to sustain rapid global economic growth will require doubling the supply of energy, and tripling the supply of electricity, by 2050. However, as nuclear power production expands, the highest standards on non proliferation safeguards, safety and security ("3s") should be promoted. This is a commitment that G-8 nations recently reaffirmed in Toyako – Hokkaido.

This brings us to one of the issues of this conference, how to meet the challenge of reconciling the world's rising demand of nuclear energy with the commitment to non proliferation enshrined in the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty.

We have to remind that the right to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes is enshrined in Article IV of the NPT. As long as civil nuclear programmes are pursued in full compliance with IAEA safeguard agreements, they cannot be considered as evidence of a proliferating intent.

Therefore, we should be prepared to accept the prospect of a revival of nuclear energy programmes, provided that they are pursued in full conformity with NPT obligations. The EU, drawing from the experience of the EURATOM Treaty, can make an important contribution in reconciling the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes with non proliferation commitments, through the development of pragmatic solutions with regard to multilateral fuel cycle initiatives.

Once again, we are facing what President Eisenhower called the “fearful atomic dilemma” and every nation, not just the United States, is called to “find the way by which the miraculous inventiveness of man shall not be dedicated to his death, but consecrated to his life”.

This global effort requires the widest possible consensus among nations, to be pursued through existing multilateral institutions, notably, among them, the IAEA, and through the reinforcement of the global non proliferation regime, starting from the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

Italy, as President of the G-8 will continue the Group’s commitment to stem the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction according to the Action Plan adopted at the Sea Island Summit in 2004.

Excellencies,

Being myself a mountain enthusiast, I particularly like the metaphor of a “basecamp”. Yes, indeed, we should plan carefully our ascent, assess alternative paths, proceed with a steady pace in order to climb the nuclear free mountaintop. The way in front of us is an ever ascending path, plenty of political pitfalls and of technical hurdles to overcome.

All States, not only nuclear powers, are called to play a constructive role, if we want to get closer to the goal of a world with zero nuclear weapons, being aware that what we need are incremental steps and that the vision will not become reality overnight.

Yet, we are bound by the duty to future generations to take the historic opportunity which lies in front of us and make our best efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. Maybe we will not see the end of the journey, but this, far from discouraging, only adds to the glory of the climb.

Let me conclude my address by wishing you an interactive and fruitful debate.