

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 14, 2012
Contact: Jesse Broder Van Dyke 202-224-7045
jesse_brodervandyke@akaka.senate.gov

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA

Managing Interagency Nuclear Nonproliferation Efforts: Are We Effectively Securing Nuclear Materials Around the World?

**Hearing
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia,
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

Aloha and thank you for being here. Today, the Subcommittee will examine interagency efforts to prevent nuclear and radiological materials from falling into the wrong hands. Since 1999, I have chaired ten related hearings on this subject and requested ten Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigations.

The terrorist threat remains serious and the consequences of a nuclear or radiological terrorist attack would be catastrophic. In 2010, President Obama stated that nuclear terrorism is the single biggest threat to U.S. security, short-term, medium-term and long-term. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported more than two thousand unauthorized incidents, such as illegal trade or movement of nuclear or radioactive material, from 1993 through 2011.

On Sunday, we commemorated the one year anniversary of Japan's Fukushima nuclear tragedy. That incident highlighted the potentially dire implications of failing to adequately prepare for and defend against unexpected events.

I want to commend President Obama, the agencies represented here today, and the many federal employees in those agencies for their commitment and hard work to bolster nuclear and radiological security. I also want to thank GAO for its diligent work, which has strengthened those efforts.

In a landmark 2009 speech in Prague, the President announced a new international effort to secure all vulnerable nuclear material within four years. The successful 2010 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, DC, spurred progress on this aggressive timetable. Since the President's speech, more than 31 nuclear bombs worth of material have been removed from countries around the world.

Most notably, Libya's nuclear weapons program was dismantled before the recent uprising began, and all highly enriched uranium has been removed from Chile, Romania, Serbia, Taiwan, and Turkey. I hope this progress will be accelerated when the President joins leaders of 52 other nations and four international organizations at the second Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, Korea in less than two weeks.

(OVER)

The scope of the upcoming Seoul Summit has been broadened to include radiological material security. I have pressed for more focus on radiological material security for more than a decade, and GAO has investigated various aspects of this issue at my request.

In 2007, GAO reported troubling shortfalls in the security of high-risk radiological materials internationally, including in Russia and the Ukraine. Today, GAO will testify to preliminary findings that highlight a number of egregious security weaknesses at domestic hospital and medical facilities where radiological materials are used and stored. These disturbing findings demonstrate the need to strengthen the security requirements for domestic radiological sources.

There is a model that could be used to enhance domestic radiological security nationwide. The Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration has worked with partners in my home state of Hawaii to complete security enhancements on all high priority radiological materials in the State. Hawaii is now safer, and I urge the Department to accelerate the implementation of this important program and to better coordinate with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to secure all high-risk sites across the country. The U.S. should serve as a model world-wide on domestic radiological security. The upcoming summit in Seoul provides an opportunity to focus the world's attention on this issue.

The Administration's bold commitment to secure all nuclear material worldwide could be paired with a new international initiative to secure all high-risk radiological materials in four years. When the U.S. leads by example, we can make great strides to improve international safety and security.

In addition to radiological sources, I remain concerned that federal agencies face challenges defining and implementing a strategic plan for nuclear security. Agencies must prioritize the highest-risk materials, ensure that nuclear and radiological materials the U.S. supplies to allies do not become a threat, and coordinate with the IAEA. I look forward to discussing these issues today. I also hope the Administration witnesses identify how Congress can best support their efforts – through adequate funding, ratification of relevant treaties, legislation, or otherwise.

The security of nuclear and radiological materials has been a priority during my tenure in the U.S. Senate, and I will continue focusing on this issue during my last year.

This is a bipartisan issue that I hope all of my colleagues will actively pursue in the future. This is not and should not be a political issue – it is about safeguarding human life, the environment, and the economy. The stakes are too high for partisanship or for Congress and the American people to ignore it.

-END-