NZ earned place at nuclear summit, Obama tells Key

By Audrey Young

1:30 PM Tuesday Apr 13, 2010

Barack Obama said New Zealand had earned its place at the nuclear security summit. Photo / AP

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama told John Key that New Zealand had "well and truly earned our place at the table" of the nuclear security summit the United States President is hosting in Washington.

The leaders have broken after their first session, a working dinner at which Mr Key sat beside the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Jan Fischer, and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yusuf Raza Gilani.

Mr Obama greeted and chatted with each leader individually before the dinner which was when Mr Obama made the comment, Mr Key told reporters.

"We can offer leadership. We have got to a position where President Obama would like to see the world - free of nuclear weapons. The fact that we don't have nuclear capability or nuclear industry doesn't mean we don't have a strong voice."

The leaders are expected to issue a communiqué tomorrow setting out some concrete steps to make the storage of fissile material more secure.

Asked whether the summit was ignoring some of the big problems such as the nuclear growth of India and Pakistan and China's nuclear programme, Mr Key said that all those countries were involved and that was a good step.

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"If we start off by either accusing countries or trying to box them into a corner we wont

make progress."

Asked if the United States was applying pressure on leaders to back Security Council sanctions against Iran for continuing its programme to highly enrich uranium, Mr Key said that Mr Obama had also said in his opening remarks to leaders that it would not be productive to single out nations.

The primary objective of the summit was to prevent nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terroriststs.

Before the summit, Mr Key had a private lunch at the New Zealand embassy with United State Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

They talked about the concerns of 30 Senators had about the impact the Trans Pacific Partnership free trade agreement agreement would have on the US dairy industry.

"He recognizes that those in individual Senators are open for negotiation if you like and we can make our points and we should make our points to them.

They shared the view that the global demand for agricultural products was going to rise.

"He also shares the view that the real issue here is not whether there are going to be enough places in the world to sell agricultural products but whether there can be enough production to satisfy the world's demand."

By Audrey Young | Email Audrey
13 April 2010 03:35 UK

Nuclear security summit hears of terror risk

The US and Russian presidents are at the summit fresh from a new treaty

World leaders at a summit on nuclear security in Washington have heard dire

warnings of the danger of nuclear material falling into the wrong hands.

President Barack Obama, opening the biggest international meeting hosted by the US since 1945, greeted leaders from nearly 50 countries.

Officials said more should be done to prevent theft or smuggling.

Meanwhile France's leader stressed his country could not give up its own nuclear weapons.

The US welcomed a Ukrainian pledge to eliminate its stockpile of highly enriched uranium by 2012.

The two-day summit is taking place without representatives of Iran and North Korea, neither of whom were invited by the US because of the disputes over their nuclear programmes.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dropped plans to attend the summit, reportedly because of concern that Muslim states planned to press for Israel to open its own nuclear facilities to international inspection.

'Proliferators not welcome'

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Ikia Amano, said that nuclear powers needed to do more to protect nuclear materials.

MARDELL'S AMERICA

“Perhaps some threats seem too much like fiction to be taken seriously”

"The problem is that nuclear material and radioactive material are not well protected and member states need to better protect these materials against the theft or smuggling," he told the BBC.
"On average every two days we receive one new information on an incident involving theft or smuggling of nuclear material."

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said that nuclear nations like Pakistan were vulnerable.

"The message from this summit is that any country can be treated as a normal country on nuclear matters if it behaves like a normal country," he said.

"Proliferators are not welcome in the modern world, nuclear proliferators especially, and I think it's a very clear message to the Iranians and others that there is an international desire to use civilian nuclear power for beneficial purposes, but not to allow it to leech into a military

weapons programme that could be so dangerous, especially in a region like the Middle East."

A senior American counter-terrorism expert, John Brennan, warned that al-Qaeda had been seeking material for a nuclear bomb for more than 15 years.

"There have been numerous reports over the past eight or nine years of attempts to obtain various types of purported material," he told reporters.

"We know al-Qaida has been involved a number of times. We know they have been scammed a number of times."

President Obama and his Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao reportedly agreed at pre-summit talks to step up pressure on Iran over its atomic plans.

"The Chinese very clearly share our concern about the Iranian nuclear programme," said Jeff Bader, Mr Obama's senior director for Asia on the National Security Council.

"The two presidents agreed the two delegations should work together on a sanctions resolution in New York."

Ukrainian precedent

Just before the summit opened, Ukraine agreed to eliminate its stockpile of weapons-grade nuclear material which, the US said, was enough to build "several weapons".

White House spokesperson Robert Gibbs: "Ukraine announced a landmark decision"

US officials said Ukraine's highly enriched uranium would be removed with some US technical and financial help.

Ukraine's agreement sets a precedent that Mr Obama would like other countries to follow, the BBC's diplomatic correspondent, Jonathan Marcus, reports from Washington.

It is estimated there are about 1,600 tonnes of highly enriched uranium in the world - the type used in nuclear weapons.

Experts agree that virtually all of it is held by the acknowledged nuclear-weapons states, most of it in Russia.

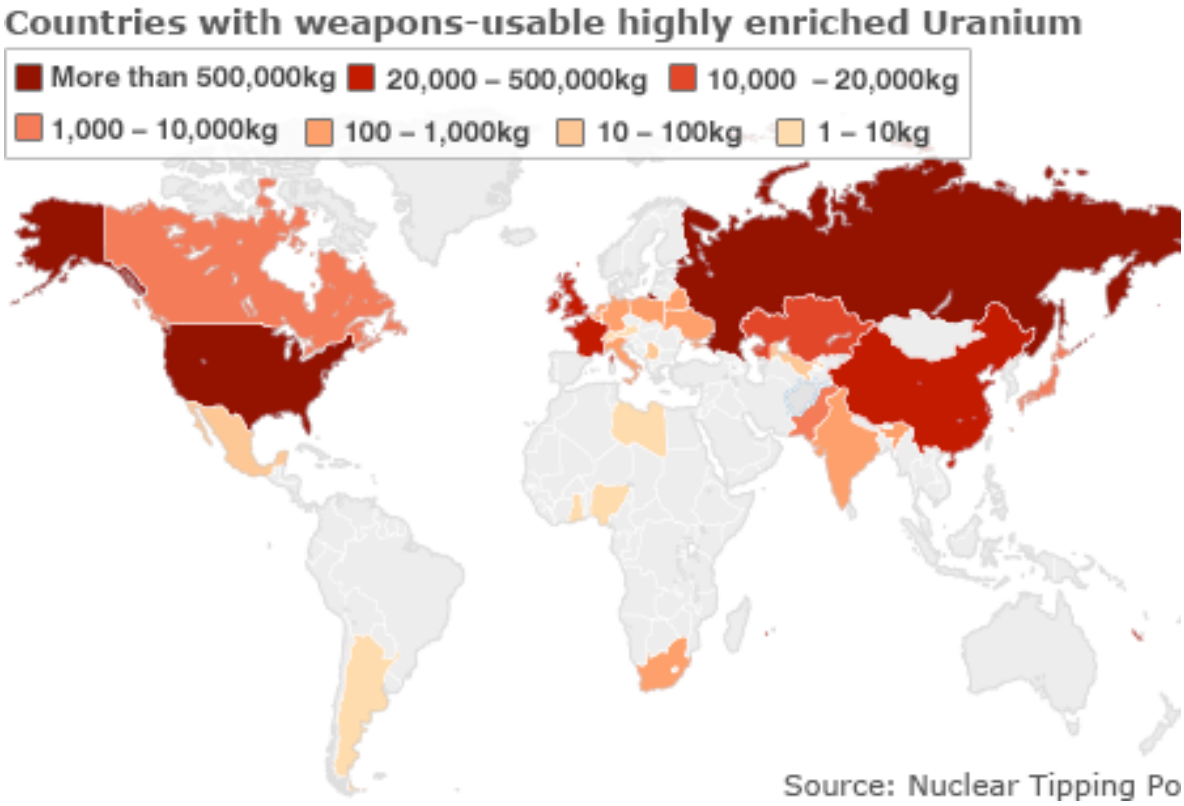
Speaking in an interview before the summit opened, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said his country would not give up its nuclear weapons because to do so would be to jeopardise national security.

"I cannot jeopardise the security and safety of my country," he told CBS News.

"I have inherited the legacy of the efforts made by my predecessors to build up France as a nuclear power and I could not give up nuclear weapons if I wasn't sure the world was a stable and safe place."

Last week, the US and Russia signed a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, reducing each country's deployed nuclear arsenal to 1,550 weapons.

Mr Obama has also approved a new nuclear policy for the US, saying he plans to cut the nuclear arsenal, refrain from nuclear tests and not use nuclear weapons against countries that do not have them.



News Americas

Iran criticises US nuclear summit

Obama wants all nuclear materials worldwide to be secured from theft within four years [AFP]

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's president, has condemned a nuclear security summit in the US, where international leaders are meeting to work out a global nuclear security strategy.

Representatives from 47 nations gathered in Washington, DC on Monday for the start of the two-day summit hosted by Barack Obama, the US president.

Obama began the gathering with a series of bilateral meetings with some of the world leaders gathered for the summit.

But Ahmadinejad, whose country was not invited to attend the conference, called the meeting "humiliating to humanity".

"World summits being organised these days are intended to humiliate human beings," Iran's Irna news agency quoted Ahmadinejad as saying.

"These foolish people who are in charge are like stupid, retarded people who brandish their swords whenever they face shortcomings, without realising that the time for this type of thing is over."

Iranian summit

Al Jazeera's Alireza Ronaghi, reporting from the Iranian capital, Tehran, said Ahmadinejad's message is not new.

"Ahmadinejad has always been famous for his aggressive tone and he has never held back when it comes to criticising the United States," he said.

"But the timing of his words is important. The Iranian government is trying to prove that there is nothing to worry about when it comes to Iran's nuclear programme, because it is totally peaceful.

"As proof of that, Iran is going to host a nuclear disarmament summit ... in Tehran on Saturday."

The US believes that Iran is attempting to build a nuclear weapon in violation of the global nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and it objects to North Korea's nuclear weapons stockpile and exports of nuclear materials and technology.

Rob Reynolds, Al Jazeera's correspondent in Washington, said Iran is not officially on the summit agenda.

But he said the country's disputed nuclear programme would be one of the chief topics of bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the summit, as it was during a meeting between Obama and Jordan's King Abdullah.

"Earlier ... Iran was one of the subjects brought up, [with] President Obama stressing to Abdullah the importance of pressuring Iran to live up to its non-proliferation treaty obligations including via the use of sanctions, if necessary."

"[But] the overall subject matter here is nuclear security and locking down and securing nuclear materials that might be used to create a nuclear bomb or a dirty bomb which could be used by groups such as al-Qaeda."

Global security threat

Obama was expected to use the conference to warn of what he has called "the biggest threat

to global security".

"The single biggest threat to US security, both short-term, medium-term and long-term, would be the possibility of a terrorist organization obtaining a nuclear weapon," Obama said at meetings with world leaders on Sunday.

Al Jazeera's Patty Culhane reports on the summit's objectives and potential outcomes

"We know that organisations like al-Qaeda are in the process of trying to secure nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction, and would have no compunction at using them."

Obama set a goal of ensuring all nuclear materials worldwide are secured from theft or diversion within four years.

The White House will seek concrete commitments from world leaders on securing stockpiles of separated plutonium and uranium, to ensure that they cannot be stolen, smuggled or sold.

"I feel very good at this stage in the degree of commitment and sense of urgency that I've seen from the world leaders so far on this issue," Obama said.

"We think we can make enormous progress on this."

The summit will focus primarily on separated plutonium and highly enriched uranium stocks, rather than radiological "dirty" bombs, which the US sees as a less catastrophic threat than nuclear devices.

Checks and balances

Meir Javedanfar, a nuclear analyst, said the summit would also seek to form a coalition among the countries participating so they can "co-operate ... and then take another step further by going to the United Nations."

"I think al-Qaeda could get its hands on nuclear weapons if these checks and balances are not put in place to make sure that nuclear stockpiles around the world are kept in safe places," he told Al Jazeera from Tel Aviv.

US officials hope nations participating in the summit will agree on a series of security steps for their own nuclear material, and help pay to put the stocks of less well-off countries under lock and key.

They also expect some leaders to unveil specific actions, similar to Chile's decision to ship a

stock of highly enriched uranium to the US.

Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, will not attend the conference and is expected to send Dan Meridor, the deputy prime minister, in his place.

Insiders said Netanyahu was worried Turkey and Egypt would use the summit to challenge him over his country's nuclear arsenal, which Israel has never officially acknowledged.

The two countries likely planned to demand that Israel sign up to the 1970 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

00:46 GMT, Monday, 12 April 2010 01:46 UK

Obama warns of nuclear terrorism

President Barack Obama has said the biggest threat to US security is the possibility of a terrorist organisation obtaining a nuclear weapon.

Speaking on the eve of a nuclear security summit in Washington, he said leaders from 40 states should focus on how to secure nuclear material.

He warned groups like al-Qaeda would not hesitate to use nuclear devices.

Neither North Korea and Iran, two states with disputed nuclear ambitions, have been invited to the summit.

The two countries are viewed by the US as violators of the non-proliferation agreement.

Syria was also left off the invitation list because the US believes Damascus also has nuclear ambitions, the Associated Press news agency notes.

But the leaders of nuclear states like India, China and Pakistan are among those coming to Washington for the biggest gathering of world leaders in the US capital in decades, says the BBC's Mark Mardell.

While the issue of what to do about Iran's nuclear ambitions is not on the agenda, it will will be at the centre of many discussions, our North America editor adds.

'South African example'

Leaders or other representatives of 47 states are attending the summit.

"*This is an unprecedented gathering - Mr Obama will hope for an unprecedented outcome*"

Jonathan Marcus
BBC diplomatic correspondent
Obama's ambitious summit

"The single biggest threat to US security, both short-term, medium-term and long-term, would be the possibility of a terrorist organisation obtaining a nuclear weapon," Mr Obama said.

"This is something that could change the security landscape in this country and around the world for years to come.

"If there was ever a detonation in New York City, or London, or Johannesburg, the ramifications economically, politically and from a security perspective would be devastating."

Mr Obama praised South Africa for being the first country to abandon a nuclear weapons programme.

South Africa had, he said, acquired special standing as a "moral leader" for voluntarily dismantling its nuclear programme in the 1990s,

He thanked its President, Jacob Zuma, for the leadership his government had shown on non-proliferation.

Israel is being represented at the summit only by a deputy prime minister amid reports that its government is worried that Turkey and Egypt might use the occasion to raise the issue of its nuclear arsenal.

Last Thursday, President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty reducing each country's deployed nuclear arsenal to 1,550 weapons.

Earlier in the week, Mr Obama approved a new nuclear policy for the United States, saying he planned to cut the nuclear arsenal, refrain from nuclear tests and not use nuclear weapons against countries that did not have them.