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NTI Co-Chairman Sam Nunn Commends Successful Removal of Dangerous Nuclear Material from Kazakhstan

Former Senator Sam Nunn, co-chairman of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, today applauded the latest successful operation to remove and secure highly enriched uranium by the U.S. government. Almost 74 kilograms (approximately 162 pounds) of “spent” highly enriched uranium (HEU) was removed from Kazakhstan by the United States and Russia.

“I congratulate the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) for the latest in a series of successful operations to secure vulnerable nuclear material. This operation gives terrorists one less target and helps make the world a safer place. The U.S. government worked closely with Russia, Kazakhstan and the International Atomic Energy Agency to remove more than 160 pounds of dangerous nuclear material – enough to make three crude nuclear devices.

“Kazakhstan has a solid history of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. It showed the world courage and leadership when it renounced the nuclear weapons remaining on its territory after the Soviet Union broke up and supported their safe and secure removal.

“Over the past several years, NNSA’s Global Threat Reduction Initiative has removed more than 1,800 pounds of Soviet-era HEU from more than 10 countries. This work is essential in preventing nuclear terrorism and deserves greater support and government resources. GTRI was modeled on a successful removal completed in the former Yugoslavia in 2002 with assistance from the Nuclear Threat Initiative. At that time, we committed \$5 million to remove two and a half nuclear bombs worth of vulnerable HEU from a poorly secured research reactor near Belgrade, because the U.S. government then lacked the congressional authority to fund such operations.

“There should be no higher security priority than keeping nuclear weapons materials out of the hands of terrorists. Led by the United States and Russia, leaders around the world must accelerate work to lock up or remove this dangerous material. It is important to note that this removal could not have occurred without cooperation between Russia, the United States and Kazakhstan. We are in a race between cooperation and catastrophe.”

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