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'Ukraine vow' at nuclear summit



Ukraine has agreed to eliminate its entire stockpile of weapons-grade nuclear material, US officials said ahead of a key nuclear security summit.

The White House said Ukraine would by 2012 get rid of enough highly enriched uranium to build "several weapons".

Leaders from 47 countries have gathered in the US for the summit, called by President Barack Obama.

Before the two-day meeting, he said a clear message needed to be sent to Iran over its nuclear ambitions.

White House spokesman Scott Gibbs said: "Today Ukraine announced a landmark decision to get rid of all of its stockpile of highly enriched uranium by the time of the next nuclear security summit in 2012.

"This is something that the United States has tried to make happen for more than 10 years. The material is enough to construct several nuclear weapons."

Al-Qaeda threat?

This summit is all about securing stocks of fissile material - highly enriched uranium and plutonium - that could potentially be used by terrorists to build a nuclear bomb, says the BBC's diplomatic correspondent, Jonathan Marcus, in Washington.

He says the timing of announcing Ukraine's decision may have been choreographed, but it is just the sort of news Mr Obama wants to hear ahead of the summit.

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

Jonathan Marcus
BBC diplomatic correspondent
[Obama's ambitious summit](#)

[Could terrorists get the bomb?](#)

US officials said that Ukraine has sufficient highly-enriched uranium for several nuclear weapons. This will be removed with some technical and financial help from the United States.

Ukraine's agreement sets a precedent that Mr Obama would like other countries to follow, says our correspondent.

It is estimated there are around 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.

There are also about 500 tonnes of the other key ingredient of a nuclear weapon - plutonium.

In total, that is enough to make 120,000 nuclear weapons.

Much international, largely US-funded, effort has attempted to clamp down on the threat of nuclear leakage from Russia in particular, but it remains a concern.

Mr Obama has also highlighted the danger of groups like al-Qaeda getting hold of nuclear devices.

New nuclear policy

Before the summit, President Obama held meetings with a handful of international leaders.

The White House said in a statement that he had discussed Iran with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak.

"The two leaders agreed on the need for the international community to send a clear signal to Iran that while it has the right to develop peaceful uses of nuclear energy, Iran should not use this right to develop nuclear weapons capability," the statement said.

Among those attending the summit are Israel, India and Pakistan - three nations that have not signed the non-proliferation treaty.

Neither North Korea nor Iran, two states with disputed nuclear ambitions, have been invited. 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 has nuclear ambitions, according to the Associated Press news agency.

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 week, the US and Russia 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 US, saying he planned to

cut the nuclear arsenal, refrain from nuclear tests and not use nuclear weapons against countries that did not have them.