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Letter, Thabo Mbeki to Al Gore

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Summary:

Responding to Al Gore's 4th April letter, Mbeki offers support for the NPT while noting the need for supermajority and strengthening the review process.

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Uitvoerende Adjunkpresident
Executive Deputy President
Kaapstad · Cape Town



April 1995

Dear Mr Vice-President

Thank you for your letter of 4 April 1995, and the accompanying paper on the question of NPT extension.

Our Minister of Foreign Affairs and his officials have been consulting very widely on this issue over the past several months in an effort to reconcile the conflicting views which confront us, and to arrive at the highest possible degree of international consensus which, we believe, would not only extend the non-proliferation regime, but perhaps also help to strengthen it.

In the process of consultation and discussion we have considered many different options. The non-paper to which you refer, argues the case for extension in perpetuity by rolling fixed periods, as one possible alternative, and as a way of avoiding a 50 % plus one vote on extension which might result in a sizable body of countries finding themselves on the outside of the non-proliferation culture which we are seeking to promote.

Our thinking on the subject has been evolving all the time, and has undergone some refinement since that non-paper was drafted. Our purpose in sharing these views with your State Department officials, was to seek the opinion of the US Government and to ensure that we reach an informed decision. We are very pleased to have the benefit of your Government's views, and the support and cooperation of your diplomatic representatives in South Africa, as we develop our own position on this question.

The Government of National Unity is committed to a policy of non-proliferation and arms control which covers all weapons of mass destruction and extends to our concerns about the proliferation of conventional weapons. In terms of this policy, it is South Africa's goal to be seen as a responsible possessor of advanced technologies. South Africa sees its non-proliferation and arms control policy as being integral to its commitment to democracy, human rights,

sustainable development, social justice and environmental protection.

South Africa supports the belief that the continued existence of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) should not be placed in jeopardy, and that the forthcoming review and extension process should strengthen, not weaken the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The national security of individual countries and of the international community as a whole will be severely damaged if the NPT is weakened.

South Africa took the decision to destroy its nuclear weapons and to become a States Party to the NPT because we saw our security being guaranteed by its provisions. It is for this reason also that South Africa became an active sponsor of an African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (ANWFZ) Treaty. Despite the criticisms which have been focused on the NPT it has been successful in achieving its primary objective, namely, preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. Since the entry into force of the NPT, for example, the number of threshold states has diminished. Countries like South Africa, Argentina and Brazil, which previously fell into this category, have drawn back from the nuclear weapons option and have become a part of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

It remains the only international instrument on nuclear disarmament to which all five nuclear weapon states are committed. The continued existence of the Treaty will ensure that this commitment by nuclear weapon states to disarmament also remains. While not underestimating the seriousness of the perception in certain quarters of inequalities inherent in the Treaty, as well as the criticism of the disarmament, peaceful uses and other provisions of the Treaty, it is believed that these concerns should not be dealt with in such a fashion that they threaten the security that the NPT provides. South Africa therefore supports the view that the NPT should be extended indefinitely.

It is appreciated that linkage of the Treaty to certain conditions raises the question inter alia of what would happen if, for one or other reason, the conditions were not met. Would the Treaty automatically terminate? The termination of the Treaty - whether this comes about by placing conditions on its future existence or by extending it only for a fixed period - is not an acceptable option for South Africa.

South Africa, because of its view that the review and extension process should not damage the Treaty, believes that any decision on extension should only be taken after every effort has been made to achieve the broadest possible

support. Any decision which is taken by a "50 % plus 1" majority would in our view weaken the Treaty. It would undermine the commitment to the NPT of those who are left on the outside. Any decision reached by consensus would be ideal, if not it would need to be taken by a significant majority. This would in all likelihood have to include key countries, especially from within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Many countries have, however, with good reason been critical about the failures and delays to:

- fully implement the disarmament provisions of the Treaty by eliminating the arsenals of the nuclear weapon states,
- provide the non-nuclear weapon states with effective security assurances,
- ensure the unencumbered transfer of peaceful nuclear technology, etc.

Many countries are of the view that it is necessary to maintain the leverage which periodic review and extension of the Treaty provides. South Africa therefore believes that a mechanism must be found to address these concerns about the implementation of the Treaty.

So as not to draw these issues into the debate about the continued existence of the Treaty, South Africa believes that it is essential that the review process provided for by Article VIII(3) must be strengthened. We believe that this can be done by the adoption of a set of "Principles for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament" which would be taken into account when the implementation of the Treaty is reviewed. These Principles would, as was the case in the Preamble of the Treaty, set out the general obligations and goals which States Parties would strive for taking into account the current international environment, which is very different from that which existed when the Treaty was negotiated. These Principles would not be an amendment of the Treaty, they would rather focus attention on the importance of these goals. Commitment to these principles would be renewed at every Review so as to ensure that they are dynamic and that they adapt to changing international circumstances. They would not be conditions which could lead to the termination of the Treaty; they would be the yardstick by which all the States Parties can measure their non-proliferation and disarmament achievements.

I would be interested in receiving your comments on these positions at your earliest convenience. I have instructed the Department of Foreign Affairs to stand ready to enter into discussions with the United States on the possible wording of a set of "Principles for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament". The Department of

Foreign Affairs also stands ready, once we have received your response, to lobby for support of indefinite extension amongst our SADC, OAU and NAM colleagues.

With warm regards.

Yours sincerely

THABO MBEKI

Vice President Al Gore
Washington D.C.