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Contact: Miles Pomper, 202-842-3100 x 318 or [mpomper@miis.edu](mailto:mpomper@miis.edu)

## **U.S. Import of Safe Medical Isotopes Increases Pressure on Senate to Act** ***Experts Say LEU Isotopes Blocked By Senate Reduce Risk of Nuke Terror***

Washington DC – After depending for decades on medical isotopes produced overseas using dangerous highly enriched uranium (HEU), the United States has for the first time ever imported medical isotopes made with low enriched uranium (LEU), a move that holds potential for reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism, experts say.

"This is a landmark development in the transition to the end of the use of weapon grade nuclear materials in civilian applications," said Kenneth Luongo, co-chair of the Fissile Materials Working Group (FMWG) and president of the Partnership for Global Security.

Radiopharmaceuticals derived from molybdenum-99 are used annually in more than 16 million medical imaging procedures in the United States alone. However, only 25 kg of HEU – which is contained within molybdenum-99 – would be necessary for a state or non-state actor to produce a single nuclear weapon. Low-enriched uranium poses far less of a risk.

The critical radioisotopes imported by the U.S. were produced by a subsidiary of the state-owned South African Nuclear Energy Corporation (Necsa). The first production-scale shipment has now been received in the United States for further evaluation and subsequent distribution to thousands of hospitals nationwide. Necsa's success in using LEU belies skeptics' claims that converting to LEU-based production would be too difficult and time consuming to effectively provide medical isotopes on the global market.

"South Africa should be commended for recognizing that the future of medical isotope production lies with processes that avoid HEU entirely. The upcoming 9/11 anniversary reminds us how devastating conventional acts of terror can be; there's no better time for the Senate to take action so others will follow South Africa's hopeful lead and help reduce the chances of the unimaginable destruction that would result from nuclear terror," said Miles Pomper, senior research associate at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and a member of the FMWG Steering Committee.

Last year, the U.S. House of Representatives moved quickly and overwhelmingly to pass the American Medical Isotopes Production Act, which promotes domestic production of medical isotopes and phases out the export of weapon-grade uranium for the purpose of producing radiopharmaceuticals. However, the bill has stalled in the Senate, where Senator Kit Bond (R-MO) has continued to block its consideration, claiming that it would interrupt the supply of molybdenum-99. This argument has been rejected by numerous experts from the government and private sector.

The Fissile Materials Working Group is a coalition of more than 40 leading experts and non-governmental organizations in nuclear security. It was formed to support and help implement the goal of securing all vulnerable fissile materials as quickly as possible.

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