

Nigeria another step closer to 'peaceful' nuclear energy

Good news for Africa

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Nigeria took another step towards acquiring nuclear technology for civilian use when it officially swore in the board of the National Atomic Energy Commission (NAEC).

The ceremony on Monday was presided over by Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo, who is also head of the body.

"In addition to the generation of electricity, nuclear energy finds ready peaceful applications in agriculture and food security, in medicine, industry and in basic and applied scientific research," Obasanjo declared.

Nigeria has had a nuclear reactor for research purposes since September 2004 and the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, has visited the site in the north to ensure that it does not pose a security risk.

Obasanjo stressed during ElBaradei's visit in January 2005 that Nigeria had no intention of becoming a nuclear power, a vow he reaffirmed during the inauguration ceremony.

"I wish to further affirm that Nigeria's aspirations for the acquisition of nuclear technology are for purely peaceful applications and that we are unequivocally committed to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," Obasanjo said.

The Nigerian leader stressed the need for his country to prepare for a period when its massive oil wealth could run dry and to explore other energy sources.

Nigeria is the leading African oil producer and the sixth-biggest exporter in the world with an estimated oil production of 2,6-million barrels per day.

The ceremony in Abuja was largely symbolic as the NAEC has existed since 1976.