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Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Mr. President, on behalf of the Czech delegation, let me congratulate you on your election to the highly responsible and challenging position of President of the 44th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). I believe that under your leadership, the deliberations of the Conference will be constructive and successful. Please be assured that the Czech delegation will do its best to support you in this position and for the success of this Conference.

It is with pleasure that I use this opportunity to extend a sincere welcome to Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and the Central African Republic as new IAEA members. The Czech Republic perceives every enlargement of the IAEA's membership as an expression of the joining countries' free will to use nuclear energy solely for peaceful purposes. We are prepared to share with them, just as with the other member states, our long-standing experience in this area.

Since the Czech Republic has joined the position presented on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries by the French Presidency, I would now touch upon those topics that are particularly important for the Czech Republic.

Mr. President,

Like most of the member states, in the past year of its activities in the area of nuclear arms non-proliferation control, the Czech Republic focused on the preparations for the 6th Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and regards its results as very positive. The Czech Republic welcomed the fact that a Final Declaration was adopted, and it will strive for its practical implementation.

For us, the peaceful use of nuclear energy is inseparably connected with applying the safeguards and improving the safeguards system of the IAEA. The Temelin nuclear power plant is currently being completed and put into operation in the Czech Republic. A statutory precondition for its start-up is also the meeting of all the requirements for the IAEA safeguards implementation, through the accountancy of nuclear materials and implementation of containment and the IAEA supervision systems in this nuclear facility. Based on long-standing consultations with the IAEA, the interconnection and tie-ins of these systems at the Temelin NPP have been conceived and developed in a quite innovative way. We are able to say today that they have been tested and commissioned successfully.

In line with the relevant provisions of the new safeguards agreement between the Czech Republic and the IAEA, and based on mutual technical consultations, new additional arrangements were drawn up in the period under review. These concern the way safeguards will be implemented at the two NPPs located in the Czech Republic.

During the last General Conference, my predecessor informed you that in the interest of strengthening

the effectiveness and improving the efficiency of the international safeguards system the Czech Republic was ready to sign with the IAEA, the Additional Protocol to its new safeguards agreement still during the last year's General Conference. It is an honor for me to inform you that the Additional Protocol was signed on 28 September 1999. Immediately thereafter, the Czech Republic proceeded to the preparation of the necessary legislative measures which would make it possible to start implementing it in the Czech Republic as soon as possible. The State Office for Nuclear Safety, the National Regulatory Authority, intends to present a draft amendment to the relevant Act to the Czech Government still this year, with the understanding that the Czech Parliament will debate it not later than in early 2001. The Czech Republic will therefore be ready to ratify and implemented the Additional Protocol very soon.

Mr. President,

The Czech Republic considers consistent implementation of safeguards, together with the physical protection of nuclear materials - not only during international transport but also in respect to all operations related to nuclear material handling in the country's territory - to be one of the pillars of prevention of illicit trafficking of nuclear materials and fight against nuclear terrorism. It therefore welcomed, and supported from the very beginning, certain states' activities aimed at a review of the Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials, and positively viewed the Informal Open-ended Expert Meeting on this issue, initiated by the IAEA Director General. The Czech Republic is convinced that in close co-operation of the member states at the relevant meetings consensus will be reached on the strengthening and broadening of this Convention.

We welcome and positively view also the activities of the IAEA in the area of physical protection, particularly workshops on illicit trafficking in nuclear material and on design basic threat. A workshop on the latter issue took place in the Czech Republic in September 1999. The information and experience gained from such event help substantially to further strengthen the effectiveness and improve the efficiency of physical protection of nuclear material and facilities.

Mr. President, I would like to assure the IAEA Secretariat at this forum that the Czech Republic continues to be ready to organize, in co-operation with the IAEA, joint events on physical protection of nuclear materials and facilities, including those on safeguards implementation, thereby helping to improve the efficiency of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Mr. President,

Nuclear power generation constitutes the main part of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in the Czech Republic. The country's new Energy Policy Strategy was drafted, and the Czech Government approved its final version at the beginning of this year. This important strategic document envisages the use of nuclear energy for electricity generation also in the future. This will contribute to the desirable diversification of energy sources, substantially support the efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, and also make it possible to reduce the exploitation of the Czech Republic's limited fossil fuel deposits. However, the Czech Government perceives the highest possible level of nuclear safety and radiation

protection as the necessary precondition for using nuclear power generating facilities. To make this aim feasible, the Czech legislative and regulatory framework for the use of nuclear energy and ionizing radiation has been profoundly reformed over the past few years. The recodified legislation reflects the experience with more than 50 reactor-years of the operation of the Dukovany NPP's four units, the current international practice (including the IAEA recommendations) and, not least, the latest findings of science and research. The Czech Republic therefore has effective legislation available, under which the State's regulatory authority is furnished with sufficient independence, resources and competencies to be able to secure the highest level of nuclear safety and radiation protection in respect of all the activities related to the use of nuclear energy and ionizing radiation.

The start-up of the first unit of the Temelin NPP has been subject to many discussions. The design of this plant which is based on project of a nuclear power plant with VVER-1000 reactors has been modernized extensively. Construction of the first unit has reached the stage of active tests. In early July, fuel was loaded into the reactor, and tests are now under way in accordance with the previously agreed programme. Each and every next step of the start-up is, naturally, preceded by intensive reviews and inspections carried out by the regulatory authority. In line with the international practice, and also the national legislation in force, the Government fully respects the assessment of nuclear safety as carried out by the independent regulatory authority.

However, the Czech Government fully recognizes the international dimension of the nuclear safety and radiation protection issues. Therefore Czech Republic has used the mechanism of expert missions organized by the IAEA for an independent review of the licensing process as applied by the State Office for Nuclear Safety for the Temelin NPP as well as of the assessment the plant's readiness for the start-up phase. The publicly available conclusions of both missions, as well as those of more than ten other missions that have taken place at the mentioned NPP over the past ten years, offer clear information about the license holder's and the responsible governmental authorities' efforts to ensure the highest achievable level of nuclear safety of this facility. Let me now refer to the results of the two missions I mentioned, which took place in February this year. The experts have unequivocally stated in their final reports that the Czech Republic has a firmly defined regulatory and legislative framework in place and that the licensing process is run in line with the world's best practice. The experts viewed the Temelin NPP's readiness for start-up also positively. It goes without saying that all the partial recommendations which the experts have handed over to the Czech side with a view to increasing the achieved level of safety even further, have been immediately implemented.

Another example of the Czech Republic's involvement in international activities is the review process of the Convention on Nuclear Safety which culminated by the meeting of the States Parties in Vienna in spring of 1999, and served again for presenting comprehensive information on compliance with the requirements of nuclear safety and radiation protection in Czech nuclear power plants. The Czech Republic aiming at achieving the highest level of nuclear safety and radiation protection has been cooperating also with other international organizations, especially OECD-NEA and with working and

advisory bodies of the European Commission. Bilateral contacts maintained by the Czech Republic with foreign countries, including our neighbours also play a very important role in its international relations. In this respect the process of information exchange has been under way for many years. In some cases, there have been joint projects enabling independent review of selected safety issues as well as exchange of experience. To summarize, the output from all of the international activities that I have indicated here represents a unique database of information on the situation in nuclear safety and radiation protection in the Czech Republic, on the basis of which anyone who wishes so may form their own opinion.

Let me declare from this place that in the case of the Temelin NPP, the assessment carried out at both the national and international levels confirms that the nuclear safety of this facility has achieved a high level indeed. In reaction to what was said here by some of the speakers, I would like to reiterate that the Czech Republic respects the legitimate interest of our neighbours in being informed of and consulted on the safety of our nuclear installations. The Czech authorities have always been ready and willing to maintain a broad dialogue on cross-border aspects of the safety of the Temelin power plant, including the environmental ones; we have never failed to provide honest answers to questions posed in the bilateral dialogue and to do so over and beyond our international legal commitments, be it bilateral or multilateral. The next one of the series of such consultative meetings will take place right at the Temelin NPP in fourteen days and both parliamentarians and experts from the Czech Republic and Austria will take part in it.

Mr. President,

The Czech Republic believes that the Programme of Technical Co-operation organized by the IAEA represents the right means to meet the objectives set forth in Article II of the Statute, which commits to "seek to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world". The Czech Republic has been involved in this programme for many years. The basic strategy of our country's involvement stems from the effort to balance the volume of technical assistance received under the Programme with the assistance provided by the country to the other member states. At this point, I would call on particularly the countries in our region to consider similar steps, which in a situation of a zero real growth of the budget may help to enlarge the activities under the Programme.

Specifically, the Czech Republic has been increasing both the voluntary financial contributions to selected national or regional projects, and in-kind assistance. Between 1998 and 2000, the Czech Government contributed USD 200,000 to the implementation of the project for Ukraine, the purpose of which is to install a new system for non-destructive testing of the VVER-1000 reactor vessels. Moreover, the Czech Government has offered another voluntary contribution of USD 100,000 to a two-year programme of assistance to Armenia's nuclear regulatory authority in the area of the assessment of the integrity of the Medzamor NPP's primary circuit. The State Office for Nuclear Safety and other Czech institutions continue to support the IAEA's efforts to strengthen the radiation protection infrastructure in some member states, organized as a part of two inter-regional model projects.

In early September, the top-level diplomats representing 14 member states of the IAEA had a unique opportunity to see the results of the model project focused on building a center for the production of short-term radiopharmaceuticals to support diagnostics in cardiology and oncology. The project will be completed this year in line with the timetable set. Reflection of the visit by some of the diplomats you could have heard during the last Board meeting.

Mr. President,

At the end of my intervention, let me express on behalf of my Government sincere thanks to the Director General Mr. ElBaradei and the whole IAEA Secretariat for their co-operation and efforts made since the last General Conference.

Thank you, Mr. President