

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Thelma M. Doran
Head of the Delegation of Ireland
at the 44th Session of the IAEA General Conference
19 September 2000

Mr President

1. I should like to begin by congratulating you on your election to the post of President of the General Conference. I can assure you of the full support and cooperation of the Irish delegation in the fulfilment of the tasks attaching to your high office over the coming days.

2. We are happy to welcome Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and the Central African Republic as new Members of the Agency.

3. Before entering into the substance of my remarks, I wish to endorse fully the statement made by the distinguished representative of France on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. President

4. Ireland wishes to express its appreciation of the work of the Agency and its staff. The Agency has played a crucial role over its long history in promoting nuclear safety, and strengthening the non-proliferation regime and the international safeguards system. We would urge the Agency to maintain its strong commitment and resolve in addressing the many challenging tasks ahead in these areas. We wish to offer to Dr El Baradei our thanks for his work in the initial phase of his directorship. We are confident that he will maintain and develop the high standards which have characterised the Agency over the last forty years. He will have Ireland's full cooperation in his endeavours.

5. As a measure of Ireland's commitment to the Agency, I am delighted to be able to announce to the Conference that this year we have increased our voluntary contribution to the Technical Cooperation Fund to 100% of the recommended target and that we expect to maintain this level in future years. Without adequate funding the Agency cannot operate successfully and Ireland is prepared to play its part to ensure that it has the necessary resources. This decision by my authorities is in keeping with the spirit of the draft resolution on the financing of Technical Cooperation and a conscious response to the urging of many delegations during the negotiations on that resolution.

Mr President

6. In the past year we have witnessed many important positive developments in the area of nuclear disarmament. We salute the United States and the Russian Federation for the bilateral nuclear force reductions they have undertaken to date and we encourage them to engage in the next steps with renewed vigour. Russia has ratified the START II Treaty and the legislation required for ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty has been adopted by the Russian parliament. With the ratification of the CTBT by the two nuclear weapon States that are members of the European Union, France and the United Kingdom, we have moved closer to establishing a norm that nuclear testing has no place on our small planet.

Mr. President

7. The nuclear non-proliferation regime remains the cornerstone of the international effort to promote the peaceful application of nuclear energy and to curb the spread of nuclear weapons. An important achievement of the Agency was the adoption by the Agency's Board of Governors of the Model Protocol for strengthening the existing Nuclear Safeguards System. Ireland believes that the extended provisions will substantially strengthen the existing safeguards regime. I am pleased to report that ratification of this Protocol by Ireland is imminent.

Mr. President

8. In 1961, when the then Foreign Minister of Ireland, Mr. Frank Aiken, tabled a resolution at the 16th General Assembly of the United Nations calling for the conclusion of an international agreement that would prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, he launched a process which the Irish Government firmly believed would eventually lead to total nuclear disarmament. Then, as now, our conviction was that genuine international peace and security can never be achieved as long as nuclear weapons remain part of the armouries of states.

Mr. President

9. In May of this year the 2000 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was held in New York. The Review Conference was a defining moment in the development of the

Treaty. The context in which this Review took place was less than promising: on the one hand, 182 States had demonstrated a commitment to refrain from the acquisition of nuclear weapons; on the other hand, the achievement of the total elimination of nuclear weapons, the goal of the Treaty, remained distant.

10. Ireland felt strongly that the time had come to implement the Treaty as it stood, and to do so in the manner which reinforced it as the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The achievements of recent years in the area of nuclear non-proliferation, such as, for example, the START Treaties, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the adoption of the model Additional Protocol to strengthen the effectiveness and improve the efficiency of the nuclear safeguards system, had aptly demonstrated that, with the necessary political will, progress was possible.

Mr. President

11. Through States Parties' admirable cooperation, compromise and reflection, and by exercising flexibility in preference to dogmatism, the Review Conference produced an agreed Final Document which reinforced the underlying bargain of the NPT. States that have refrained from developing nuclear weapons have received an unequivocal commitment from the nuclear weapons states that they will accomplish the total elimination of their arsenals through a number of steps laid out in the document. However, we must not now be lulled into a sense of complacency by the achievement of an agreed programme of action. This programme represents a clear obligation to make nuclear

disarmament a reality and, for our part, Ireland is determined to work vigorously to achieve this goal.

Mr. President,

12. Ireland continues to view the International Atomic Energy Agency as an organization which plays a crucial role in promoting nuclear safety worldwide. The Agency has managed to carry out its mandate successfully despite the wide range of views and diverse approaches of many countries to nuclear energy.

13. For countries such as Ireland, with no wish or ambition to undertake a nuclear power programme, and indeed in our case where there is a very strong popular opposition to the nuclear industry, trends in the global debate about nuclear power are of particular interest. North America and Western Europe are not currently expanding their nuclear capacity and the contribution of nuclear power to the energy mix is expected to decline. On the other hand, in the developing world, particularly in China, India and the Republic of Korea, an expansion of nuclear production is in prospect.

14. Such trends present a number of challenges and dilemmas. What is the most sensible way of protecting current and future generations from the potential risks of nuclear activities? How best can we ensure that nuclear safety reaches the very highest standards? How do we respond to advocates of nuclear power who believe that it contributes significantly to the reduction of greenhouse gas

emissions? In the recent past, the IAEA, the Nuclear Energy Agency and the International Energy Agency have been exploring the future prospects of nuclear power in the light of a wide range of factors, such as public opinion, the impact of deregulation and the weighing up of the claimed advantages and disadvantages of nuclear power to the environment.

15. Ireland, while taking a firm anti-nuclear stance, believes that it is right that these issues should be examined as objectively as possible so that policy makers can make informed choices in years to come. Accordingly, the Secretariat of the Agency and the other organisations which have been investigating these issues, have a challenging task ahead in maintaining clear-sightedness and a balanced approach. It is virtually impossible to debate nuclear power without emotions running high on either side of the nuclear argument. As always, Ireland takes particular interest in how an improved safety culture can be fostered. We also recognise the importance of researching technology and instrumentation which will minimise accident risk.

Mr. President,

16. There can be no complacency about nuclear safety issues. The Tokaimura accident in Japan shows that even in a technologically advanced society such as Japan, the safety culture can suffer. We hope that the necessary lessons will be learnt from the Tokaimura accident. The Agency has a huge role to play in bringing about international confidence that the serious deficiencies exposed by the accident have been remedied. Ireland is ready to work with other countries in undertaking

whatever steps are necessary by way of promotion of standards to ensure that the circumstances which led to this accident do not recur.

17. Ireland is strongly supportive of the initiatives of the Agency, the EU and the Nuclear Energy Agency aimed at improving radiation safety in the operation of the former Soviet Union designed WWER and RBMK reactors in Eastern Europe. Ireland supports calls for the closure of the Chernobyl type RI3MK reactors which, despite some modifications to improve safety, still possess inherent design faults which make them less safe than other light water reactors. As to the WWER reactors, it is Ireland's view that the earlier models should be shut down and decommissioned. The later models should similarly be shut down and decommissioned if they cannot be upgraded to the highest international standards.

Mr. President,

18. It is widely known that the major focus of concern among the Irish public relates to the UK nuclear facilities and, in particular, to the reprocessing facilities at Sellafield, because of the proximity of these facilities to Ireland. We object to the continuation of hazardous nuclear activities at Sellafield, such as the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel and the storage on site of high-level radioactive liquid waste. We are also strongly opposed to any expansion of the nuclear industry and have conveyed to the UK our total opposition to current proposals to establish a Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Plant at Sellafield. The Irish Government's concerns about Sellafield have become even

more acute following the critical reports about safety at the plant which were published earlier this year by the UK's nuclear regulatory authority.

19. Ireland was among 12 of the 15 Contracting Parties to the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-east-Atlantic which joined forces at a meeting of the OSPAR Commission at Copenhagen on 29 June this year to adopt a decision which clearly signals the extent of international concern about nuclear reprocessing activities at Sellafield and La Hague. The decision adopted by the Contracting Parties requires that a review be carried out by the competent national authorities, as a matter of priority, of current authorisations for discharges or releases of radioactive substances from nuclear reprocessing facilities, with a view to implementing the non-reprocessing option such as dry storage for spent nuclear fuel management at appropriate facilities; and taking preventive measures to minimise the risk of pollution by accidents.

20. The June decision is indicative of the growing pressure being brought to bear on countries engaged in nuclear reprocessing to bring an end to such activities. Ireland hopes that the UK and France will respond positively to the clear signal they have received from so many of their neighbours.

Mr. President

21. In general Ireland believes that the Agency has a sufficiently broad programme to address the often-conflicting views of its members but we would like to explore how nuclear safety issues

can be given an even higher status and priority. We would be supportive of initiatives in this area and are anxious to work with like-minded countries on how this can best be achieved.

22. In conclusion, I would like to say that this year Ireland is pleased to avail of the opportunity to have a representative on the Agency's Board of Governors and looks forward to active participation through the Board in the operation of the Agency.

Thank you, Mr. President