

## **SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL STATEMENT TO THE 44th REGULAR SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY (IAEA) GENERAL CONFERENCE**

### **SPEECH BY DEPUTY MINISTER SUSAN SHABANGU**

Mr. President

South Africa would also like to congratulate you, the Vice-Presidents and Members of Committees on your assumption of leadership positions to steer the work of the 44th Regular Session of the IAEA General Conference. My delegation also thanks the Director-General of the Agency, Mr. Mohamed ElBaradei, for his informative statement on the work and achievements of the Agency in the past year in the fields of technology, safety and verification

Mr President

With the splitting of the atom almost universal optimism existed that the world's energy problems would be solved and that the peaceful uses of nuclear energy would become the magic key that could unlock new doors to a better future for all. Since that time, nuclear technology applications have moved from research laboratories to routine use in hospitals, agriculture, Industrial enterprises and universities. Isotopes and radiation applications have come to play an important role in providing humanity with basic requirements for their well being, such as food and water and a satisfactory standard of health. South Africa has benefited from these developments in many ways illustrated by the following examples:

Recently my country's technical cooperation with the IAEA culminated in the Agency's involvement in reviewing the technical and economic feasibility, safety and nuclear non-proliferation aspects of the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR). Once again we thank the Agency for the role it has played with regard to PBMR investigations and the IAEA review report which will inform our further decision-making process on the possible expansion of nuclear power generation in South Africa.

The Technical Co-operation (TC) programme in South Africa has been significantly increased due to a number of successful project proposals for the 1999/2000 cycle. South Africa currently enjoys the highest implementation rate in Africa for its TC projects. Furthermore, our Country Programme Framework (CPF) process has been completed and should further contribute to a vital and rewarding TC programme in South Africa and the rest of the regions.

In the field of education, South Africa provides education in Radiation Protection to Member States of the Agency in Africa. This initiative resulted in the establishment of a Center for Postgraduate Education in Radiation Protection at the University of the Witwatersrand, with assistance from the IAEA. In addition to this, in 1999 thirty-four (34) fellows/ scientific visitors from developing countries completed their training in South Africa. During the same period, thirteen (13) South African fellows/ scientific visitors were placed for training in institutions overseas.

Taking into account the key role that education plays in economic development, and in particular the vital necessity to create a proper infrastructure for the development of nuclear technology, this is an important contribution to the economic growth of our continent. In view of the vitally important role of education and the capacity that South Africa is able to offer in this regard, we are confident that this will prove to be a way in which the resources of the IAEA can contribute successfully to our goal of an African Renaissance.

In the field of development, the Regional Center for Isotope Studies in Ground Water established at the University of the Witwatersrand, with the assistance of the IAEA, continues to make a major contribution to many projects to promote and sustain the effective usage of water resources. In this regard and like in many other aspects of development on the African Continent, my Government will strive for the continued participation of South Africa experts in the Agency's formations like AFRA Specialized Teams.

Mr. President

The question of nuclear, radiation and waste safety is a cause of great concern to my delegation. When we met here last year, we expressed our sympathy with the Japanese Government regarding the Tokaimura incident that had just seized the attention of the world. This incident demonstrated why it is crucial to have an effective worldwide safety regime in place. It is for this reason that in the past year South Africa embarked on various activities related to nuclear safety. Not only has revised nuclear legislation dealing with nuclear safety regulation

been implemented in February this year, but extensive periodic safety reviews have also been completed at the Koeberg nuclear power plant. Attention has furthermore been focused on safety indicators as one of the tools that can provide an ongoing assurance of safety arrangements. Significant effort was expended to ensure that both the Koeberg nuclear power station as well as the national electricity network were unaffected by the Y2K phenomenon.

Environmental considerations and waste management practices are a matter of public and Government concern and therefore it becomes imperative to design new technological methods to respond to this challenge. South Africa is addressing this challenge in a holistic way. A national radioactive waste management policy and strategy are currently under development. This will pave the way for signature and ratification of the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management.

Spent fuel from the Koeberg nuclear power plant continues to be stored on the Koeberg site in wet storage racks and dry storage casks. Spent fuel from the SAFARI research reactor is stored on site in a dry pipe storage facility. Radioactive waste continues to be generated from the decommissioning of the front-end nuclear fuel cycle facilities previously operated in South Africa. A programme to fully assess and then manage these liabilities is being implemented. In this connection, South Africa commends the Agency for the guidance it provided and still provides in developing standards for the management of such wastes.

South Africa also attaches a lot of importance to the activities of the Agency in the field of verification and the security of nuclear material. In this regard we welcome the outcome of the 2000 NPT Review Conference with particular reference to the importance of the Agency's safeguards system in strengthening the non-proliferation regime and in providing assurance of compliance with non-proliferation undertakings.

The recognition of the role of Agency Safeguards and support for the universal implementation thereof, emphasizes the "strategic partnership" that exists between the IAEA as the trustee of the safeguards system on the one hand, and the international community on the other. I call it a "strategic partnership" because international efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to achieve nuclear disarmament are shared responsibilities that cannot be accomplished by any single organization or State on its own.

South Africa welcomes the steps that are being taken to strengthen the Agency's Safeguards System. New measures were introduced within the existing authority of the Agency, and following the adoption of the Additional Model Protocol, new legal authority with respect to information and access became available. The challenge is to successfully integrate elements of the traditional system with those newly available into an effective and cost-efficient new system. In the process of integration, it is necessary to venture from the comfort of an established and well-known system into new terrain with new perspectives and practices, in many cases still to be explored. This is a major challenge requiring, to some extent, a change in safeguards culture. We welcome the fact that work is underway in the IAEA, SAGSI and through Member State support programmes, to define the first phases of the integration process. In view of the increasing safeguards obligations of the Agency and the well known budget limitations, the only possible way in solving this conundrum, is a flexible and streamlined system from which the appurtenances of tradition, not in line with modern requirements, have been removed. South Africa is looking forward to the new, integrated system, which, it is hoped, will not only enhance international non-proliferation efforts, but will also bring tangible benefits to those who are subject to Safeguards Agreements. In this connection, it should be mentioned that legal procedures pertaining to the signature and ratification of the Additional Protocol in South Africa are currently underway and it is expected that this process will be finalized in due course.

Mr. President

In concluding my statement, I would like to join other Member States in welcoming Azerbaijan, the Central African Republic, and Tajikistan into our fold. It is our wish that this will be the beginning of a rewarding strategic partnership between these countries and the Agency. We believe that by this act these countries will be making an important contribution to the universalisation of the goals of the Agency and indeed the advancement of the uses of "Atoms for Peace" as well as the furtherance of non-proliferation as a critical means along the road towards ridding the world of nuclear weapons. We commend the Agency for its activities in attempting to make the world a better, safer and more prosperous place.

I thank you Mr. President.