

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE TO THE 44TH IAEA GENERAL CONFERENCE

Vienna, 18 September

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to convey my warm greetings to the 44th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The IAEA plays a vital role in meeting the challenges the international community has to face in the areas of peace and development. By preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, improving and strengthening nuclear safety, and helping to develop the peaceful uses of nuclear technology for sustainable development, the Agency makes a unique contribution to the purposes of peace and prosperity in the world.

I would like to turn first to the Agency's role in seeking to prevent nuclear proliferation. Despite some progress in the reduction of nuclear weapons - in particular the Russian Federation's ratification of the START II agreement - there is deep concern within the international community at the major threat that such weapons continue to pose to international peace and security. The positive outcome of the 2000 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is therefore encouraging. For the first time in 15 years, States parties to the Treaty were able to reach a consensus on several issues crucial to the security of all the peoples of the world. They pledged to make new efforts aimed at the total elimination of nuclear arsenals, halting the global spread of nuclear weapons, and strengthening the essential standards governing the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. I am also pleased that at the Millennium Summit, just two weeks ago, world leaders have resolved to keep all options open for achieving the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, including the possibility of convening an international conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers.

The Agency has played a significant role in the success of the 2000 Review Conference of the NPT. It has now an even greater role to play in verifying States' fulfilment of their obligations as further arms control and disarmament measures identified at the Conference are pursued. In this context, I welcome the Agency's continuing efforts to strengthen and improve the nuclear safeguards system. And I would like once again to urge all Member States to accept the Additional Protocols to Existing Safeguards Agreements as a means of further strengthening this system.

Although the 2000 Review Conference marks a significant step forward, much remains to be done to free the world of nuclear dangers. The number of ratifications of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty has increased during the past year, but the

challenges that confront its entry into force persist, especially after the United States Senate's rejection of ratification in October 1999. I reiterate my call to all States to ratify the Treaty, particularly those whose ratification is necessary for its entry into force.

We are facing yet another danger now, namely, the growing pressure to deploy national missile defences. Let me stress that within the scientific community, there is widespread scepticism that such systems could ever work effectively. There is however real concern that their deployment could lead to a new arms race, set back nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation policies, and create new incentives for missile proliferation. I trust that States will weigh these factors very carefully before embarking on a path that could jeopardize the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and that may reduce, rather than enhance, global security.

Nuclear safety is another area where concern is growing. One aspect which is particularly worrisome for the long term is radioactive waste management. I am pleased that the International Conference held last March in Spain on this matter has identified safe and publicly acceptable solutions for the management of radioactive waste. I expect that the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management - which is now close to entering into force - will help to promote higher levels of nuclear safety worldwide.

I would also like to commend the efficiency of the Agency in responding rapidly to requests for emergency assistance, and to pay tribute to those Member States who repeatedly offer assistance - in the form of experts and material - in cases of a nuclear accident or radiological emergency. These are examples of international cooperation for the common good. But there is another area where greater international cooperation is needed : the fight against illicit trafficking of nuclear materials and other radioactive substances. The IAEA and the international community must urgently address this very real threat to global security and public health.

Safety is also very important when it comes to the transfer of nuclear technology to developing countries for peaceful purposes and sustainable development. Given the substantial contribution of nuclear techniques in areas as varied as food production and agriculture, human health, the management of fresh water resources and the control of industrial pollution, the Agency's technical cooperation programme should be strengthened and given all the support it needs.

Finally, let me stress that in today's world, we cannot rely only on governments and international organizations for solving national and international problems, and achieving our common objectives of peace and prosperity. We must work in partnership with non State actors. I encourage the IAEA to continue its efforts to increase public awareness and strengthen its relationship with civil society and the public sector.

I wish you a very successful conference and I look forward to cooperating closely with the IAEA on the important issues you are going to examine during this session.

Thank you.