

INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY GENERAL CONFERENCE

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STATEMENT

LATVIA

STATEMENT BY MR. RAIMONDS VEJONIS,

Minister of Environment

Mr. President,

I am pleased to join others in congratulating you on your election as Conference President and look forward to participating under your guidance. My delegation is convinced that the Conference will have successful outcomes. I would like also to express my greetings and best wishes to the staff of the Agency and to Director General Doctor Mohamed ElBaradei in further promoting the peaceful use of nuclear technologies for development goals especially in relations to human life and environment as well as in efforts in the field of nuclear non-proliferation.

I fully associate myself with the statement made by the honourable delegate of Netherlands on behalf of the European Union.

I would also like to join the previous speakers in welcoming Republic of Chad, Islamic Republic of Mauritania and Togolese Republic as new member of the Agency.

Mr. President,

Looking back to the resolutions of 47th General Conference and activities since last year in Latvia I will focus only on some important issues for my country as well as on ways to improve our joint efforts and continue working together for the benefits of international community.

Firstly, I will talk about very challenging question discussed during several last years, namely nuclear knowledge management. Secondly, I will focus on some technical cooperation issues, which are important for Latvia. In the final part of my speech, I would like to highlight some insights on our national plans for technical cooperation with the Agency.

Knowledge management

Mr. President,

We are well aware about difficulties encountered today for many technical sciences and applications. These issues are of particular importance for countries like Latvia experiencing fast changes in many fields and trends for the young generation to find their interests in non-technical fields. We are conscious that the nuclear science, technology and applications contribute to many means of human socio-economic development. For our country at present, most important nuclear applications are in fields of health care and natural sciences. I will return to this in relation to national technical cooperation projects. Unfortunately, the number of graduates in the nuclear field has a decreasing trend. Thus, there is no other option left as to cooperate with other countries in order to maintain the knowledge and the Agency's role is already well defined for facilitation of such cooperation as well as technical and methodological support.

We recognize that preserving and enhancing of nuclear knowledge is very important to ensure the availability of qualified experts vital to the safe and secure utilization of nuclear technologies. Therefore, we are promoting the networking among relevant establishments and institutions; our experts have participated in international activities in the past and we will continue the knowledge building also in the future.

Security of radiation sources

Mr. President,

We strongly support the Action plans and activities in the field of source security. I believe, there is no need to convince other distinguished delegates that safety is tightly linked with security, especially for high activity sources and nuclear facilities. We believe that global implementation of an effective system for safety and security of radiation

sources delivers universal security benefits and therefore all efforts to establish and to enhance regulatory framework and supervisory capabilities shall be treated as top priority.

Let me recap on one particular issue. As we know, in certain geographical regions, there are many countries, which are not involved in our joint activities and do not receive support from the Agency. We should work together to promote benefits of being member state of the Agency - in such a way we will enhance the safety and security of radiation sources. More efficient international and national activities to ensure safety and security of our inhabitants and environment are necessary directly at source location.

Safeguards and non-proliferation

Mr. President,

Latvia considers a nuclear non-proliferation regime of universal character, supported by a strong system of safeguards, as being essential for collective security. The Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the main instrument for global non-proliferation regime; therefore, all countries in a world shall adhere to it. Unfortunately, still around 40 countries, parties of NPT have no Safeguards Agreement concluded and only 60 Additional Protocols are in force.

Analysing the situation with respect to other international instruments aimed to prevent proliferation and development of weapons of mass destruction, we find that situation needs to be improved. There are only few tens of countries, which participate in regimes for import, export and transit control of dual use nuclear items. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has not come into force - around 80 countries have not ratified it as yet, including a dozen of Annex 2 countries. Therefore, Latvia calls upon States that have not yet signed and ratified the CTBT to do so at their earliest convenience.

Technical cooperation

Mr. President,

Latvia as always pledged and paid its full contribution for TC. For several years, we use governmental cost-sharing approach for high priority projects successfully. We, together with other new members of EU, have agreed on common position regarding technical cooperation. Definitely, we have, by valuable assistance of the Agency, gained benefits

from joint activities with the Agency and now we have reached the level when we could confidently provide assistance to others.

After the analyses of new approach for financial contributions to the technical cooperation, we learned that the Agency is making smooth move - replacement of Accessed Program Costs by National Participation Costs. This approach is fully acceptable; it should also help the Agency to maintain funds as necessary and to be convinced that there is a commitment from the Member States. Moreover, transfer of funds also indicates willingness of a country to implement project. We hope that the level of voluntary contributions for Technical Cooperation Fund will increase and, consequently, that the Agency will be able to offer extra help to its Member States. Therefore we appeal to all Member States to pay their contribution in full and in due time to enable the Agency to meet our expectations.

Medical applications

Mr. President,

Latvia participates in national and regional technical cooperation projects related to the human health care and applications of nuclear techniques for diagnostics and treatments. As we informed you already in last General Conference, we are active in feasibility studies for the use of Positron Emission Tomography (PET).

Now these ideas are at the final stage and Latvia submitted the full scope implementation project for cyclotron facility to the Agency last year. This project is very important for Latvia; it will contribute greatly for the developments in nuclear science and applications as well. As the cyclotron facility will be installed at research reactor site, which is in early stage of decommissioning, it will help to preserve working places for scientists and will provide alternatives for further activities.

Throughout this year, we are hard at analysing the methods how to better utilise national and Agency's funds in this cost-sharing project. This is also one of reasons for me to be here - to discuss relevant issues with the management of technical cooperation department and I am quite confident that we will be able to find acceptable options for both sides.

Radioactive waste management and decommissioning

Mr. President,

Latvia is working on implementation of our Radioactive Waste Management Strategy. Among several challenging tasks is disposal for long-lived radiation sources, which could well be an international undertaking. Therefore, we joined other countries, which work on these issues under EU auspices, but we believe that there is also space for wider activities led by the Agency in this respect.

Let me add few words about the progress on decommissioning. Detailed information is included into third National report under Nuclear Safety Convention, but as many of Member States are not parties of that convention, it should be worth mentioned what has been accomplished since last September. By now, our experts with help from the Agency have managed to realise around 15% of entire decommissioning plan. We also the environmental impact assessment study for decommissioning; as next activity, similar study is initiated for expansion of the radioactive waste disposal site to manage all waste from decommissioning.

Unfortunately, there still is no real progress to report on spent fuel issue. We learned in May this year about new initiatives from the Government of the USA. We hope, that time schedule agreed among the USA and the Russian Federation will be followed and highly enriched uranium fuel from our (and others) research reactors will be returned to the countries of origin. Since these issues are still to be solved, we are implementing a temporary solution needed for further decommissioning activities, namely, the establishment of a short-term dry storage in transportable casks.

In conclusion, Mr President, I can assure you that Government of Latvia will continue to support the Agency as it implements its programs. We look forward to working with the Agency to meet the new challenges that lie ahead in coming months and years.

Thank you, Mr. President!