

STATEMENT BY FINLAND

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Ambassador to Austria
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to the

49th General Conference of the
International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Finnish delegation, I would like to join the previous speakers in congratulating you on your election as President of the 49th General Conference. I would like to assure you of our full support in fulfilling your important task this week. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Belize as the newest member to the Agency.

Mr. President,

I associate myself fully with the statement made by the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. In the following, I would like to comment on a few issues that are of particular interest to Finland, including the recent developments in our nuclear power programme. A full version of my statement will be distributed in written form.

Mr. President,

Nuclear weapons proliferation, including potential proliferation to non-state actors, is a serious concern to my government. Finland stresses the importance of full compliance with all the NPT provisions and the relevant safeguards agreements, including the additional protocols thereto. The international community must take the appropriate measures in the cases of non-compliance in order to preserve the integrity and authority of the system.

The past year has again shown that the nuclear non-proliferation regime is facing a number of difficult challenges. Finland regrets that the NPT States Parties could not agree on any substantive outcome at the 2005 Review Conference. Similarly, the UN Summit fell short of addressing issues related to disarmament and non-proliferation. This is a disappointing result.

To my government, the NPT remains the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. We will continue to promote issues of key importance, such as the universalisation of the Treaty, strengthening of the Agency's safeguards system, strengthening of export controls, early entry into force of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, as well as immediate start of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty and its early conclusion.

We also welcome the Agency's high-level expert group study on multilateral nuclear approaches and are ready to participate actively in discussing it.

Mr. President,

Finland strongly supports the strengthening of the Agency's safeguards system. The Agency's capability and legal authority to assure the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities need to be reinforced. We urge all states that have not yet done so, to promptly conclude and bring into force additional protocols. The comprehensive safeguards agreement, together with the Additional Protocol represents the current verification standard.

The implementation of Finland's Additional Protocol started last year in good cooperation with the Agency and Euratom. The practical safeguards measures taken by the national safeguards system will enable the Agency to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of safeguards implementation on the way to the Integrated Safeguards.

The relationship between the Agency and Euratom is of vital importance, since the new safeguards approaches of Euratom have to meet also the Agency's inspection needs. In order to test the practical implementation of Euratom's new safeguards approaches, Finland has offered to carry out a field trial at a Finnish nuclear facility.

The Finnish Support Programme to the Agency's safeguards activities contributes to the training of safeguards inspectors and carries out exercises on the implementation of the Additional Protocol. In addition, the Finnish Support Programme is developing new verification tools for the Agency's use.

Mr. President,

Finland welcomes the considerable progress achieved in the field of nuclear security in 2005. Two important Conventions were adopted and revised, respectively. Finland was among the first states to sign the Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism two weeks ago, in New York. As regards the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, CPPNM, we call upon all states for early ratification of the Amendment. We welcome measures taken against illicit trafficking and most notably the UN Security Council Resolution 1540.

The Agency has an important role to play in preventing and detecting nuclear and radiological terrorism. Finland welcomes the new Nuclear Security Plan that has just been adopted by the Board. We have provided support in-kind to the Agency's activities and we are pleased to announce today another voluntary contribution to the Nuclear Security Fund. As so many other states, Finland has also written to the Director-General, expressing full support to the Code of Conduct on the Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources, and to the Guidance on the Import and Export of Radioactive Sources.

The high level of nuclear safety is of paramount importance to my Government. Finland is a party to all international safety conventions and has participated actively in the recent Review Meetings. We call upon all countries to accede to the safety conventions and apply the resulting obligations in full.

Finland appreciates very much the work that the Agency has done in setting up modern safety standards. We find the preparatory process valuable and believe it benefits many other governments as well. When developing standards, it should be noted that safety, security and safeguards form an increasingly interwoven system, each of them being essential for the use of nuclear power.

Finland attaches great importance to the Technical Co-operation Programme of the Agency. We consider that the funding of these activities should be a joint responsibility between all Members. Finland has always paid its share in full and on time both to the Regular Budget and to the Technical Co-operation Fund.

We would like to emphasize that the projects of the Technical Co-operation Programme should be fully within the Agency's terms of reference and based on national development strategies. Increasing UN-wide coherence is essential if we are to achieve effective and sustainable results.

Mr. President,

Nuclear energy has played a major role in the Finnish electricity production since the early 1980s. 25 % of our total electricity consumption is produced with nuclear power. Currently, there are four nuclear power plant units in operation in Finland.

The fifth reactor was approved by the Parliament in 2002 after a thorough preparatory process and discussion. The increased nuclear power production promotes long-term energy supply and enhances Finland's possibilities in meeting the greenhouse gas emission target of the Kyoto Protocol.

The construction license for building the fifth reactor, called Olkiluoto 3, was granted by the Finnish Government in February 2005. The actual construction work is now underway. According to the plans of the utility company, TVO, operation of the 1600 MW unit will begin in 2009.

TVO has chosen the European pressurized water type power plant unit, EPR, that will be supplied by a Franco-German consortium. The project is the largest industrial investment of all times in Finland and the biggest ongoing investment in Europe in this field. So far contracts have been concluded with more than 600 suppliers and subcontractors. The main components are manufactured in several countries.

The Finnish Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority, STUK, is closely supervising the project as an independent regulatory agency. The safety objectives are higher than in the current generation of nuclear power plants and the vendor has developed many novel technical solutions.

Mr. President,

The use of nuclear power requires a robust and reliable solution for the final disposal of highly active and long-lived nuclear waste. In 2001, the Finnish Parliament ratified the Government's landmark decision on the construction of a final repository site in the Finnish bedrock. This means that all nuclear waste generated in Finland will be handled, stored and permanently disposed of in the Finnish territory.

The excavation of a deep underground facility started in 2004. This facility is likely to form part of the final underground repository for spent nuclear fuel. The depth of 520 metres should be reached in 2009 and the repository should be operational in 2020.

The final disposal of spent nuclear fuel - with the aim of making the nuclear materials permanently inaccessible - is a new challenge to the Agency's safeguards. A completely new type of safeguards approach is needed for geological disposal sites. Finland is fully committed to continuing support to the Agency in order to develop appropriate safeguards measures for the facility under construction.

It is important to note that the deep underground facility in Finland is the first of its kind in the world. Similar projects will follow in other countries and the Agency needs to be involved. Finland wishes to emphasize the importance of allocating adequate resources from the Agency, both human and financial, to safeguards implementation and to safeguards approach development. We believe that enhanced co-operation between the Agency and national safeguards systems, and early implementation of Integrated Safeguards will lead to more efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Mr. President,

I would like to conclude my remarks by congratulating Director-General, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei on his re-election to the helm of this important organisation. On behalf of my government and delegation, I wish him the best of success for the new term. Finland reiterates its full support to the Agency and its activities. We are convinced that under the able leadership of Dr. ElBaradei, the Agency will continue its professional, objective and impartial work to the benefit of the whole membership.

Thank you, Mr. President.