

Multilateral Nuclear Approaches (MNA) Background

Recent events have shown the need to further strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime. In this context, the IAEA Director General has often noted, the obligation to ensure that peaceful uses of nuclear technology are carried out in such a way as not to lend themselves to weapons proliferation. The Director General has therefore advocated a re-assessment of strengthening international controls applied to sensitive parts of the nuclear fuel cycle – uranium enrichment, plutonium separation and spent fuel management – under the current nuclear non-proliferation regime.

In his statement to the IAEA General Conference in September 2003, the Director General first put forward his initial ideas regarding international cooperation on the nuclear fuel cycle. These ideas were developed further in an "Editorial by Invitation" in the 18 October 2003 edition of *The Economist*. The Director General suggested that it is time for the international community to re-examine nuclear non-proliferation options, including those which would explore the merits of limiting the use of weapon-usable nuclear material (plutonium and high enriched uranium) in civilian nuclear programmes, by permitting it only under multilateral control. The Director General noted that any such limitation would need to be accompanied by proper rules of transparency and, above all, by an assurance that legitimate would-be users could obtain access to nuclear fuel for peaceful uses under Agency safeguards. In addition, he proposed that the international community considers multilateral approaches to the management and disposal of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste.

These proposals of the Director General reflect, as well, the remarkable success of several multinational and regional nuclear companies and arrangements, and their economic benefits including assurances of supply. International cooperation can not only decrease proliferation concerns, but also enhance the benefits of nuclear energy for human development.

In this spirit, the Director General announced at the June 2004 meeting of the IAEA's Board of Governors that he had appointed an international expert group to consider possible multilateral approaches to the front and back ends of the nuclear fuel cycle. The mandate of this group is to identify issues and possible options in this regard and to submit a report to the Director General by March 2005. The findings of the group could be also transmitted to the 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

The Group consists of 23 experts participating in their personal capacity, drawn from as many countries. Mr. Bruno Pellaud, former IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of the Department of Safeguards has been designated as chairman. (The expert group will hold its meetings at the IAEA's Headquarters in Vienna between the end of August 2004 and the end of February 2005.