

Tuesday, 19 February 2008

Federal Government seeks multilateralization of nuclear fuel cycle

Germany is stepping up its efforts to establish an international uranium-enrichment plant under the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Today, at IAEA's headquarters in Vienna, Federal Government representatives informed interested States about the details of the German proposals to multilateralize the nuclear fuel cycle, receiving a highly positive response. This concept is based on an initiative by Federal Foreign Minister Steinmeier.

More and more countries are thinking of starting their own enrichment activities. Any joint solution must therefore take the desire for the peaceful use of nuclear energy into account, while at the same time making sure no fuel is misused to build nuclear weapons. At the core of the Steinmeier proposal is the establishment of a commercial uranium-enrichment plant in a special territory transferred to IAEA administration.

Today (19 February), in Berlin, Foreign Minister Steinmeier issued the following statement on the information event in Vienna:

"Answering the global trend towards nuclear enrichment is one of the strategic challenges facing us today. We must promote international cooperation if we want to limit the risks posed by uranium enrichment. Our proposal reconciles the interests of countries already possessing enrichment plants and those which rely on supplies of enriched uranium.

A transparent joint procedure has the potential to harmonize assurance of supply and non-proliferation. We have once again received a highly positive response in Vienna, and for that reason we will continue to vigorously lobby all interested States for a multilateral model."

With this initiative the Federal Foreign Office is underscoring the German Government's efforts to resolve security issues through international cooperation. Representatives of all IAEA member countries were invited to the event.

Federal Minister Steinmeier first put forward his initiative in September 2006. Since then the German Government has drawn up detailed proposals on a number of aspects with the support of experts and in close coordination with the IAEA.

The proposed plant would not be supervised by a national government but by the IAEA, which due to its Statute is able to administer such a plant. The IAEA itself would not, however, act as the plant's commercial operator. The plant would be financed and operated by interested States' nuclear industry. Transfer of sensitive technology would be excluded using appropriate measures.

Independently developed, national uranium-enrichment plants are likely to be uneconomic compared to participation in the multilateral plant.