

PRESIDENT'S CLOSING STATEMENT
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE SAFETY OF TRANSPORT OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL
11 JULY 2003

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In his opening address, the Director General of the IAEA outlined some of the history of this topic and the background to this Conference. I do not intend to repeat that account, but simply to recall that efforts by the international community to harmonize international practices for the safe transport of radioactive material have a history going back four or five decades. Over that period, the IAEA's Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material, in their different editions, have played a central role. In more recent years, the IAEA General Conference has been one of the major forums for the debate on transport safety issues. It is therefore fitting that the IAEA has taken the lead in organizing this Conference.

The level of participation — well over 500 nominated participants from 82 States and 14 organizations — is a clear indication of the level of interest, and the lively discussions during the week have confirmed this. The objective of the Conference was to foster the exchange of information on critical issues relating to the safety of transport of radioactive material and to formulate findings based on the papers contributed and the discussions held, and we have certainly achieved that.

The transport of radioactive material is essential for a very wide range of beneficial uses: the generation of electricity and many industrial, medical and other applications. It will therefore be accepted providing people are confident that it is safe. Historically, the safety record of radioactive material transport is excellent, and all parties involved should continue to co-operate in ensuring that this excellent record is maintained. Nevertheless, many people continue to be concerned. The high level of confidence that is needed for widespread acceptance depends on convincing people that the transport of radioactive material is subject to rigorous safety requirements and that those requirements are always complied with.

There was broad agreement among Conference participants that the IAEA Transport Regulations, and the regulations of the modal organizations based on the IAEA Regulations, provide a sound technical basis for the safe transport of radioactive material. There is room for improvement of the regulations in a number of technical areas, and the detailed issues involved — and discussed during this Conference — should continue to be pursued by the relevant organizations, with due account of the need to balance the benefits of flexibility and continuing improvement against those of regulatory stability. In particular, we want to be sure that the regulations can readily be applied to all the types of radioactive material that might need to be transported, while leaving some flexibility in the handling of some materials, such as urgent medical supplies. This means making sure not only that the regulations are applicable to all these types of material and are as simple to apply as possible, but also that those who have to apply the regulations have sufficient guidance so as to be able to apply them correctly. The detailed findings from the technical sessions indicated some areas in which such guidance might be particularly desirable, and in most cases the IAEA would be an appropriate body to provide it.

There remains the challenge of extending the broad agreement that the regulations provide a good basis for safety beyond the Conference room: to convince all those involved in the transport of radioactive material and also the wider public that the regulations provide effectively for their safety.

The larger issue in relation to the regulations is that of compliance. The regulations are already very widely applied, but the goal must be to reach a situation in which they are applied consistently by all States to all transports of all types of radioactive material, and

furthermore are *seen* to be applied consistently to all transports. In this regard, the Conference findings emphasize the importance of rigorous compliance assurance and quality assurance, and noted the value of the IAEA's TranSAS service as a tool for both promoting and demonstrating compliance with the regulations.

Looking beyond the technical findings, there are clearly issues on which real differences of opinion remain, notably those of comprehensive adherence to a global liability regime and certain aspects of communication between governments. These issues can be resolved only through dialogue, and the Conference provided a valuable opportunity for such dialogue. But there are complex legal issues involved, and it is unrealistic to expect to resolve them during a week-long Conference. Although progress has been made, the dialogue needs to continue, and the IAEA should continue to promote it. I would like to acknowledge the willingness of States with different positions on these issues to work together constructively in defining possible ways forward with a view to enhancing communication and understanding. I hope that this will open avenues to better co-operation by all concerned in addressing these issues.

In my opening address, I said that we would be judged on the basis of whether we had used the opportunity of this major Conference to build on the new consensus embodied in last year's General Conference resolution regarding transport, on new communication initiatives and on the growing interest in TranSAS missions. You have responded very positively to the challenge to undertake a thorough review of the regulatory and technical issues on the agenda, to maximize discussion and to seek dialogue and communication where differences exist.

The summary and findings of the Conference are evidence of achievement and in some cases identify the way ahead on difficult issues. Thank you for your good work this week.