

# Yemen

## *New capacities will help save lives*



**No one was expecting** Dr. Moustafa Bahran, Chairman of Yemen's National Atomic Energy Commission, to take the floor during the IAEA's 49th General Conference, though he represents his country on the IAEA Board of Governors. His spontaneous intervention was prompted by events in Yemen the previous day.

He began by thanking IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei and the Agency's technical cooperation programme. "Yesterday, in my country Yemen, the first patient has received radiotherapy treatment," he said. "Prior to this we were never able to provide this critical component of health care to our citizens. This patient is an 11-year-old boy and he is now being offered a future thanks to your efforts."

Dr. Bahran recalls that there was a stunned silence and then a spontaneous eruption of applause. "This is why we do what we do," he recounted in September 2005 at the Agency's General Conference, and why Yemen is part of the IAEA's Model Project for upgrading radiation protection.

Today Yemen is reaping the benefits of nuclear technology — not just in the medical sector but also in the oil industry and in research. Dr. Bahran says the country needs to assure its citizens that they are protected in the process. Yemen's radiation protection landscape is fertile - a big leap from merely six years ago when the country had no infrastructure in place. Through the Model Project, Dr. Bahran says he was able to plan how to move forward into this uncharted territory on the political, legislative, legal, and regulatory fronts. Support to the plan came swiftly, when in 1999 the President of Yemen issued a comprehensive decree authorizing a National Atomic Energy Commission to implement a radiation protection infrastructure in accordance with the IAEA's *Basic Safety Standards*. Yemen's Model Project was officially off the ground.

Dr. Bahran beams with fatherly pride: "Our system is like no other — strong and effective to the degree

that every single radioactive source is under strict control." The six-year-old legislative and political infrastructure caters to Yemen's problems, which, he admits, are fortunately not big ones. "In the United States there are two million radioactive sources, in Yemen only 200. So I can be very successful — I can afford to put two soldiers by each source."

Dr Bahran is most proud of efforts in the medical sector — both in protecting medical technicians working with radiotherapy and patients undergoing radiotherapy and other types of radiation-based procedures.

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He singles out the case of X-rays. Until recently, he says, it was not unusual for doctors to over-prescribe X-rays for patients — "especially in the rural communities where uneducated patients felt that they weren't being properly cared for if they were not prescribed an X-ray."

Yemen's regulatory system now works to ensure good practices and controls for X-rays, including to pregnant women. Dr. Bahran estimates that 8,000 to 20,000 babies have been saved in his country with the help of radiography for medical diagnosis.

"A society cannot measure this," he concludes. "The impact is far-reaching."

—Linda Lodding/Managing Editor