

INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

15 July 2002

Dear Secretary Abraham,

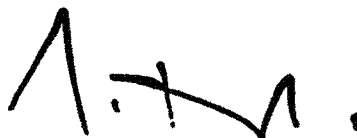
I congratulate you on the recent decision taken by the US Senate in support of the Administration's recommendation that Yucca Mountain be considered for development as the national facility for the underground disposal of spent reactor fuel and other highly radioactive materials.

While all types of radioactive waste need to be managed safely, the problem of spent fuel and high level waste has acquired special significance. The issue is not simply one of achieving safety but of convincing the public that this can and has been done. Geologic disposal, the technology envisioned by many countries, has yet to be demonstrated on a large scale. The decision by the Senate with regard to Yucca Mountain can be said to mark the beginning of a new era, constituting, as it does, an essential legal requirement that, subject to further review of the license application, will result in the establishment of the first geologic repository for spent fuel and high level waste in the United States. The safe, economic and environmentally sound operation of the facility will contribute significantly to convincing the public that reliable solutions for final disposal do indeed exist and ensuring that nuclear power, a clean source of energy, continues to be a viable option.

Moreover, in light of the entry into operation of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico in 1999 and the recent decision in principle by the Parliament of Finland on the Olkiluoto site as a location for that country's spent fuel repository, it can now be seen that tangible progress is being made in the disposal of radioactive waste.

I am particularly pleased that the IAEA was able to contribute to the decision on Yucca Mountain by organizing during the past year two international peer reviews of the Total System Performance Assessment methodology employed by DOE to support its site recommendation decision. And, as your programme proceeds, the Agency stands ready to provide further independent, authoritative technical advice on the safety and technology aspects of geologic disposal.

Yours sincerely,



Mohamed ElBaradei

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