



**Statement by Ambassador Andrej Benedejčič, Head of Delegation and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Slovenia, at the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual Regular Session of the IAEA General Conference, Vienna, 20 September 2017**

*Madam President,*

In addition to what has already been said on behalf of the European Union, I would like to make several remarks in my national capacity. Let me start by congratulating you, Ambassador Collins, for your election as the President of the 61<sup>st</sup> Session of the IAEA General Conference. As you pointed out yourself, this is only the third time in history that this high position has been held by a woman. This achievement is all the more significant in light of an important forthcoming anniversary: in November we will be celebrating 150 years since the birth of Marie Skłodowska-Curie, who not only developed the theory of radioactivity, but even coined that term herself. It is therefore only appropriate that this year the Agency has managed to increase the percentage of women in professional and higher categories to an all-time high. It is also fitting that the Director General took an active part in the launch of the Vienna Chapter of the International Gender Champions in June. Let me therefore say that in his efforts to achieve gender parity throughout the Secretariat he can count on the support of Slovenia, which is also a founding member of the recently established Group of Friends for Women in Nuclear.

*Madam President,*

While developments in the IAEA Secretariat are encouraging, those in the outside world are less so. I am, of course, referring to the recent nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which Slovenia strongly condemns. This was a blatant violation of numerous resolutions adopted by both the UN Security Council and the IAEA. As such it highlights the importance of the full implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and a speedy entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. It also highlights the need for Pyongyang to return to the system of IAEA safeguards inspections. In this context, we welcome the recent establishment of a DPRK Team within the IAEA Secretariat. In our view, this is an important decision, which will further strengthen the Agency's readiness to provide for impartial verification. As we all know, the Agency already plays such an important monitoring role in the case of Iran's nuclear program. Indeed, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action clearly shows that even the most difficult issues can be resolved by diplomatic and peaceful means. Slovenia therefore counts on continued compliance with the nuclear deal by all sides. Let me also point out that it is precisely because of my country's attachment to nuclear non-proliferation and peaceful uses of the atom that we used this year's Bled Strategic Forum for a special discussion on global nuclear governance, which was also attended by the Director General.

*Madam President,*

The recent visit of the Director General to Slovenia was also appreciated in light of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our membership in the IAEA, which we are marking this month. As one of only 30 countries with operating nuclear reactors we have always attached great importance to our relationship with the Agency. I am therefore happy to report that the Krško NPP continues its stable operation without any significant events and thus remains one of the

pillars of energy supply in Slovenia. Nonetheless, we remain vigilant in ensuring its continued safety and security, also in cooperation with the Agency. This May the power plant thus hosted its fourth visit by the Operational Safety Review Team. It was also actively engaged in the ConvEx-3 exercise, organized by Hungary in June, in which Slovenia played the role of a neighbouring state. Preparations for the Emergency Preparedness Review mission that will take place in November are in full swing. In addition, all the relevant national agencies took part in this year's annual emergency exercise, which was based on a scenario that involved a plane crash on the power plant's turbine building.

Turning to other issues, I would like to underline the appreciation of Slovenia for the Agency's efforts in developing the scope and efficiency of the technical cooperation program. In our view, it provides invaluable support to Member States in using nuclear science and techniques for their benefit in a safe manner. Slovenia has always been supportive of this program and strived to accommodate as many requests as possible. This year, just as in the past, we have therefore trained IAEA fellows and organized scientific visits and workshops for those who would like to get familiar with our practices. Our experts also took part in the Agency's peer review missions. Let me also mention that this year, within the framework of the European Commission's nuclear safety assistance programs, the Slovenian Nuclear Safety Administration started working on a project to strengthen the capabilities of the Iranian Nuclear Regulatory Authority.

*Madam President,*

Before concluding, I would like to underline the importance of international legal instruments, especially the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials. Slovenian experts were deeply engaged in the process of its preparation. It should therefore come as no surprise when I say that we strongly believe it should be ratified by all parties as soon as possible. In this connection, I would like to confirm our willingness to take part in the preparation of the review meeting in 2021. I also cannot but mention my country's continued renewal and strengthening of its network of bilateral nuclear cooperation agreements. This year we thus concluded, for the fifth time in a row, a five-year arrangement between the Slovenian Nuclear Safety Administration and the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission on the exchange of technical information and cooperation in nuclear safety matters.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely congratulate the Director General, Mr. Yukia Amano, on his reappointment for a third term at the helm of the IAEA. Slovenia, as a member of the Board of Governors, supported his candidacy early on. We therefore count on his experience and wisdom to continue guiding the Agency through these unpredictable times, when its work is becoming increasingly important to all of us.

*Thank you.*