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INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION ON THE SAFETY OF NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

1. The Director General has received from three Member States the following communications regarding international co-operation on the safety of nuclear power plants within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency:

- (i) Letter dated 17 May 1979 from the Federal Minister for Research and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany, together with the explanation of the proposal made by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany;
- (ii) Letter dated 21 May 1979 from the Resident Representative of Brazil to the Agency;
- (iii) Letter dated 31 May 1979 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden.

2. The texts of these three communications are reproduced below for the information of all Members of the Agency.

- (i) Letter from the Federal Minister for Research and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany

"Bonn, 17 May 1979

"Mr. Director-General,

"I would like to follow up the conversation we had during your recent visit to Bonn and raise the matter of international co-operation regarding the safety of nuclear power plants.

"The safety of such installations is a concern shared by the people and governments of many countries. It is rightly becoming increasingly the centre of public attention. In the opinion of the Federal Government there is therefore an urgent need to examine the associated issues in detail in the context of international co-operation as well.

"The International Atomic Energy Agency has a world-wide mandate as regards the peaceful use of nuclear energy. I am also aware that the IAEA has already taken important steps towards international co-ordination in respect of the safety of nuclear plants.

"I would like to suggest that the IAEA, under your direction, give this task priority treatment. You can count on the support of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. I hope that your efforts will yield results which help the governments and the public at large to assess the question of the safety of nuclear power plants.

"Co-operation on the safety of nuclear power plants within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

Explanation of the proposal made by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany dated 17th May 1979

"The issue of the safety of nuclear power plants is of global significance. While it is primarily the direct concern of the country in which these plants are operated it is also of relevance to the neighbouring countries. At the same time, the associated psychological factors influence the public assessment all over the world of the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

"The proposal of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany is designed to initiate an objective study on the safety of nuclear power plants. In the first phase, the main safety criteria would have to be listed and the available operating experience recorded. In the second phase, an evaluation would have to be made, in the context of which the greatest possible measure of agreement should be sought. Any differences of opinion and the right of each country freely to take its own decision would have to be respected.

"All countries interested in nuclear energy should be requested to participate in the study. The results should be made available not only to those involved as well as other governments and international organizations but also to the public at large.

"The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna has a world-wide mandate as regards the peaceful use of nuclear energy. It would therefore be welcomed if the IAEA adopted the present proposal for a critical examination. The IAEA would be able to make use of the valuable work it has already accomplished in this field. Some of the procedures employed in the on-going International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation (INFCE) could also be used.

"The following issues could be examined:

1. Evaluation of the safety concepts for nuclear power plants, also on the basis of the operating experience gained throughout the world;
2. Comparison of the basic safety requirements to be applied and ways and means of harmonizing them;
3. Exchange of views on the future development of safety concepts;
4. Intensified international co-operation in safety research and engineering.

"The results of the study should be summarized in a way which the general public can understand."

(ii) Letter from the Resident Representative from Brazil to the Agency

"Vienna, 21 May 1979

"Sir,

"Upon instructions from my Government, I wish to express to your Excellency the great interest of the Brazilian Government in having the matter of reactor safety given prompt and special attention within the framework of the Agency's activities. As you are aware, my country is carrying out a program which will enable Brazil to make the maximum possible use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and we therefore give special priority to this question.

"The Brazilian Government would like to have this matter subjected to a careful examination by the international community in order to make it possible for the nuclear energy to be used in an increasingly safe and efficient way for the benefit of mankind.

"My Government shall bring its best contribution to this important task.

"I avail myself of this opportunity to renew to you, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration."

(iii) Letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

"Stockholm, May 31 1979

"Sir,

"At present more than 200 nuclear power reactors are in operation in 22 countries. These reactors contribute to a vital part of electricity production in these countries. Nuclear power is subject to stringent safety and regulative measures according to national legislation. Continued and improved safety to health and the environment is of course vital to any continued use of nuclear power. A harmonization of rules and regulations in force in various countries through the development of internationally agreed safety rules and standards would be of prime importance.

"In his statement at the first plenary conference of INFCE in Vienna on 27 November 1978 the Swedish Minister for Energy, Mr. Carl Tham stated inter alia that '.... safety aspects of nuclear power certainly have a number of international dimensions. Within this field it is essential that international co-operation is intensified in order to achieve additional and improved standard and guidelines'.

"We have noted that in his statement in Hamburg on 7 May Chancellor Helmut Schmidt similarly addressed the international aspects of nuclear safety and placed emphasis on the need for joint efforts of States in the direction of new international agreements regarding nuclear safety, standards for technical safety and guidelines for safe operation of nuclear power plants.

"The recent accident at Three Mile Island has underlined the importance of safety issues and increased the interest in measures aiming at improved safety at nuclear plants in operation.

"At the meeting of the Governing Board of the International Energy Agency at Ministerial level 21-22 May 1979, there was agreement inter alia on the urgent need for effective national and international efforts to ensure that safety systems are sufficient to minimize the possibility of nuclear plant accidents and their consequences, and to adequately inform the public of the results.

"In the field of operational safety the IAEA is doing very important work. The Agency's Nuclear Safety Standard program has resulted in a number of very useful safety guides and codes of practice. In the above-mentioned statement the Swedish Minister for Energy said that deepened and extended work as regards development of safety codes and minimum safety requirements for all types of nuclear installations as well as of possible international agreements should be a major task for the Agency in the coming years.

"The problem of operational safety affects all countries having nuclear power plants and many other countries as well. It therefore appears desirable that norms and recommendations by the IAEA and the ICRP be transformed into agreements among states. Such agreements would constitute safety requirements for operating nuclear power plants. In the view of the Swedish Government it is very important that work in this direction be started as soon as possible.

"We welcome the fact that you have called a meeting of experts to give advice on what the Agency could do with regard to nuclear safety in the light of the Three Mile Island accident.

"Another step which might be taken - and this is an idea which the Swedish Government would like to raise with you - is the identification of areas in the field of nuclear safety which are suitable for international agreements. Such identification could probably best be done at a meeting or meetings arranged by the IAEA. The aim of such meetings could be to consider and possibly to make recommendations with regard to further international work in the field of safety to health and the environment from the operation of nuclear power plants and, specifically, possible international agreements in this field. Such work could thus be the starting point for the elaboration of internationally agreed rules and standards in this field.

"Should it prove convenient to the IAEA, the Swedish Government would be ready to host a meeting with these aims with representatives of interested governments in 1980.

"We would appreciate if you could consider the suggestions made above and hope that we could have your views on these matters.

"Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration."