

# THEN & NOW

## THE IAEA TURNS FORTY

The International Atomic Energy Agency turns forty at a time of hope and anticipation — moving beyond the confines of its own work as an intergovernmental body States created in July 1957 as the world's "atoms for peace" organization. A new millennium is at hand. People wonder how the next chapters in the nuclear age will evolve, and how safe and productive that age will be.

From the global perspective, tomorrow's nuclear age is emerging as far less threatening — and no less promising — than the one being left behind in the dust of the Cold War. Results of global nuclear cooperation over the past years renewed the hopeful 1950s' vision of "disarming atomic energy". Though there is still a long way to go, the day is drawing closer when no government finds "security" in nuclear weapons, and all States enshrine their commitments against the bomb's risks and uncertainties in lasting law. States took some giant steps over the past decade. The treaty to prevent the bomb's further spread was indefinitely extended. Countries in three more regions of the world bound themselves by forming nuclear-weapon-free zones. Nuclear testing was banned under a newly adopted global treaty. States agreed to new, and more intrusive, safeguards inspection measures for the IAEA's verification of their

nuclear programmes. Talks opened for the international verification of nuclear disarmament. All these steps are charting a different course into the next century. Yet they bring new and difficult issues to the world's nuclear agenda.

In the IAEA's relatively short lifetime, the past ten years especially have been challenging and turbulent times. Setting the stage were far-reaching changes to the world's political landscape. External events swept nuclear issues and the Agency from the back to the front pages of newspapers and onto television screens. Reports raised both fears and expectations about the development of nuclear technology and the Agency's role.

This memorable period — the years 1986 to 1997 — is the focus of this edition of the *IAEA Bulletin*. The decade tested much of the world's common ground. It demonstrated the strengths, and weaknesses, of global action, and hence challenged the capacity, determination, and experience of an international organization and its members. In a real sense, the years brought out the best of the IAEA's character and tradition, and reconfirmed its role in governmental eyes as the world's central point for nuclear cooperation. (See the *Supplement inside for a chronology covering the IAEA's history*.)

For many observers, the decade was defined by three crises that deepened worries

and desires for our own, and the planet's, mutual safety: it opened in 1986 with the tragic accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in the Ukraine, when the international community's responsiveness and commitment were tested. Less than five years later, in early 1991, the discovery of a secret nuclear-weapon programme in Iraq cast doubts on the world's ability to stop the spread of the bomb, and sharply questioned the capabilities of national operatives and IAEA safeguards to detect diversions. Within a year, the nature of the nuclear programme in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was raising proliferation concerns, and the safeguards system was challenged again.

These events taught hard lessons that were not lost in briefing and meeting rooms. Governments incrementally moved to reinforce and strengthen global regimes for nuclear safety and safeguards in substantive and sometimes groundbreaking ways. They used the IAEA as their main collective instrument of action. A major result has been a much stronger legal framework for achieving and maintaining high levels of nuclear and radiation safety, and for verifying the exclusively peaceful uses of nuclear materials. At issue today is sustaining the momentum, finding ways and means to more fully fund and activate the new frameworks that have been put into place.

Beyond the crises stands a long list of less widely publicized events and developments over the past decade — in fields ranging from arms control to pest control — to

which the IAEA has responded. Many of the challenges concern basic human needs — for safe food, water, and energy, good health care, and a cleaner environment.

**H**eading toward the next millennium, the IAEA is starting major new chapters in its history. December 1997 will see a change of leadership at the top. After sixteen years in office, Director General Hans Blix passes the Secretariat's stewardship to a newly appointed leader, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei of Egypt. He will become only the fourth Director General in the IAEA's history. (See box.)

Another new chapter is opening for nuclear safeguards, where the IAEA's inspectorate has been granted greater authority and rights of access, in efforts to build stronger capabilities to detect possible secret nuclear activities. States now are being asked to accept the legal document defining new verification measures. Still other chapters are opening in fields of nuclear and radiation safety, radioactive waste management, nuclear power, and technical cooperation. New strategies and approaches target the best "niches" for proven nuclear technologies, promote wider use of safety standards, and build up capabilities to enable more lasting and direct benefits in countries.

How these new chapters came to be outlined over the past ten years is the story of this special anniversary edition. How they ultimately will be written remains the subject of another time.—*Lothar Wedekind, Editor*

**W**hen the IAEA Secretariat's top job changes hands this December, Dr. Hans Blix of Sweden will turn over the leadership to Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei of Egypt. During his sixteen years in office since 1981, Dr. Blix guided the IAEA through several crises — including the temporary withdrawal of the USA from the IAEA at the end of 1982, the Chernobyl disaster, and violations of their safeguards agreements by Iraq and the DPRK. As observers have noted, under his direction the Agency accomplished much to enhance its authority and role in international affairs, and to bolster the international legal regime for nuclear energy. His analysis of the lessons of Iraq provided the framework for a strengthened safeguards programme approved by the Board in May 1997 — the most important development in international nuclear safeguards since the NPT safeguards system was set up in 1971.



Dr. ElBaradei was appointed to succeed Dr. Blix in June 1997 by a unanimous decision of the Agency's 35-member Board of Governors. The IAEA General Conference is expected to approve his appointment to an initial four-year term starting in December. Dr. ElBaradei holds the rank of Ambassador in the Egyptian Foreign Service. He is a distinguished international lawyer and diplomat and author of numerous publications on the United Nations, the IAEA and international law. He has served the IAEA since 1984 in several senior capacities, currently as Assistant Director General for External Relations.

Dr. ElBaradei becomes only the fourth Director General of the IAEA in forty years. The second was Dr. Sigvard Eklund, a distinguished Swedish scientist first appointed in 1961. Dr. Eklund was reappointed four more times and held the post for twenty consecutive years until he retired and was named Director General Emeritus. It was during his tenure that the main scientific and technical pro-



grammes, including supporting research and analytical laboratories, were established and developed.

At the top during the IAEA's formative years was Mr. Sterling Cole of the United States, the first appointed IAEA Director General who served from 1957-61. A US Congressman, he had been the Chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy of the US Congress.