

Dear colleagues and friends

On Monday when I made my opening address I spoke about the evolution of the global nuclear safety regime and the reasons why it has come about, essentially the global nature of the nuclear industry and technology and the great importance of maintaining high levels of nuclear safety worldwide. I also spoke of a global radioactive waste safety regime, which has emerged as a component part of this global nuclear safety regime – a component involving not only waste from nuclear fuel cycle installations but also the many and increasing uses of radioactive materials worldwide – and a recognition of the need to control radiation hazards associated with exploiting minerals and handling materials containing elevated levels of naturally occurring radionuclides. Because of the strong societal and public character and long term environmental implication, strategic government policy intervention is particularly relevant and important.

I spoke of the role of the IAEA in this global regime – developing safety standards and assisting in their use and application, emphasising the need to fulfil this role competently. Particularly in view of the re-emergence of nuclear energy generation as a major component in the worldwide mix of energy generating options, and the ever-increasing demand for energy worldwide.

I also spoke of the waste safety action plan, which was established to assist the Agency to prioritise its work in the waste safety area, and which has been updated on an

ongoing basis. The plan was initiated and updated based on the outcome of the recent international meetings on the safety of radioactive waste management – Cordoba 2000, Vienna 2002 and Cordoba 2004. We now have the task to reflect on the long and lively debate of Tokyo 2005 and see where our efforts should be focussed and directed over the next few years.

The Global regime

A clear need exists to involve more countries in the Joint Convention. The conference suggested adopting innovative ways to encourage accession, possibly considering observer status on an initial basis. And exploring ways to facilitate involvement in the convention activities – possibly more straightforward and focused reporting and review mechanisms and continual assistance arrangements to prepare national reports and to take actions based on the findings of the review meeting.

The meeting also suggested that the convention should consider the establishment of working groups that could explore issues such as the use of safety standards, the rules of procedure, even the establishment of international networks of sharing knowledge and experience including archives of information important to the long term safety of radioactive waste disposal facilities.

I would encourage Contracting parties to the convention to give consideration to such matters at its forthcoming meetings.

The safety standards

Considerable reference was made during the week to the international safety standards for radioactive waste disposal. Consensus seemed to have emerged that one set of safety requirements for all disposal facilities could have considerable utility. The recently adopted Safety Requirements for geological disposal with its clear and precise set of twenty three requirements appears to have established a good model for such a Safety Requirements standard. The conference also appeared to agree that specific guidance should be developed on good and best practise for how particular types of disposal facility should comply with the requirements.

The need was identified to develop or revise and update safety guides relating to the disposal of waste containing naturally occurring radionuclides, classification of radioactive waste, low activity waste and long lived non-heat generating waste. Further consideration also needs to be given to international guidance on use of the standards for existing facilities and to radiation protection criteria for the longer term.

Regarding more general use and application of the safety standards, it would seem that regional networks for promoting, sharing and feedback of lessons learned have an increasing role to play as an important component in the global regime. Good experience has been demonstrated in

Latin America and Europe and the proposed Asian regional network deserves support.

International peer review is playing an increasing role, as evidenced by some of the larger regulatory authorities from countries with significant nuclear programmes requesting review of their activities against international standards. Also international cooperative programmes such as ISAM and ASAM have proved their value in harmonising safety assessment methodology and assisting in its application for near surface disposal. Similar programmes covering all disposal types appear to be indicated.

The need was also recognised for further development of regulatory capacity to complement that of the organisations developing and operating radioactive waste disposal facilities – an area where regional and international initiatives could be of value.

Similarly the establishment of national waste management strategies could be assisted with further international debate and consensus on development of the concept of a common framework, with particular reference to waste containing naturally occurring radionuclides and low activity waste. The issue of intermediate depth disposal would also appear to warrant further international debate. Updating and revising of the guidance on waste classification will no doubt assist in this regard.

The use of safety cases in developing confidence in the safety of radioactive waste disposal facilities is becoming

accepted international practice. Correspondingly the need is recognised to ensure effective regulatory dialogue to ensure that such safety cases and their supporting safety assessments meet regulatory expectations and provide a basis for communicating safety to all stakeholders.

Considerable discussion took place on communication of safety with stakeholders. Obviously many lessons have been learned in this regard, which need to be adapted to country specific situations. Suggestions were also made for the international organisations to explore what positive role they could play in this regard.

It is clear from the week's discussions that safety philosophies for radioactive waste disposal are maturing – although there is still room for further deepening and refinement. The structure and content of the basic safety arguments are also maturing. These developments have been assisted considerably by the ongoing process of international interaction and debate. It is important that we do not lose momentum in this regard as the world community is looking towards us collectively to ensure that radioactive waste can be safely managed and that we are able to answer the question I posed on Monday – can radioactive waste be safely managed and disposed of? The answer does appear to be with an unequivocal yes, but also strong evidence is needed in support of this answer.

It is also vital that we continue to expand the networks of communication between experts throughout the worldwide community to share the knowledge we are developing in

the area of radioactive waste safety, and to ensure that knowledge is widely shared , preserved and effectively passed on to succeeding generations. We have learned some hard lessons over the past two decades and are developing sound approaches to both ensuring safety and providing the public with assurance of that safety. We must not lose this knowledge and experience.

In closing I would like to emphasise again the gratitude of the Agency, and I am sure of all participants, to our Japanese host organisations and the staff members from NISA and JENES for all the time and efforts they have expended personally. This has been an extremely well organised event, which has enabled the debate to go forward both effectively and efficiently. I thank our hosts for their generous hospitality and the opportunity to enjoy some Japanese culture – particularly that blend of ancient and modern culture that Tokyo represents.

I thank all of you for supporting the conference, especially the speakers, chairs, rapporteurs and panellist for their hard work in preparation for the meeting and everyone for their lively input during the week.