

First meeting of the Coordination Group for Uranium Legacy Sites (CGULS)

Opening remarks

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I would like to welcome you to Vienna once again. It is a pleasure to open today this first CGULS meeting. We have been working hard to get to this point and it is a pleasure to finally see it come to fruition. Now the real common work begins. I look forward to productive and informative discussions during the course of this meeting. Our challenge over the next three days is to understand each other's activities and look for opportunities to build synergies. We have several mechanisms to accomplish this. We will review the draft strategic plan developed by many of you here in April. We have created a CGULS website for information exchange and we have brought together the key organizations and institutes to build a remediation network.

Background

As many of you are aware, in 2004 the Central Asian Republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan approached the IAEA with the request to receive technical assistance and expert advice to deal with the legacy sites of the former uranium industry. Over the last several years, at the request of its Member States, the IAEA has initiated several national and regional projects in Central Asia, funded both from Technical Cooperation and the regular budget.

These projects have been directed at building national capacity in the areas of regulatory infrastructure, analytical services, radiation protection, environmental sampling/monitoring, and safety assessments with the ultimate goal of quantifying and reducing radiological risks to the public and the environment.

Concurrently with the IAEA, a number of other organizations have been also active in the region. Just to mention a few, projects addressing the issues of the legacy sites were implemented by the European Commission-AIDCO, the World Bank (WB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). These organizations addressed the problem of the uranium legacy sites from various perspectives, all of which are complementary to the overall objective of minimization of the health and environmental hazards.

This group, CGULS, stands on the shoulders of what has been achieved up to this point. The Member States of Central Asia, the IAEA, and the international community have a strong interest in the environmentally sound, socially responsible, and systematic remediation of the uranium production legacy sites located in the region. CGULS can ensure the remediation activities will be consistent with international standards, recommendations and good practice and compliant with national regulatory requirements.

CGULS will provide:

- 1) A mechanism to promote co-operation between all countries and international organizations interested in contributing to projects aimed at enhancing the safety of uranium legacy sites in Central Asia;
- 2) A forum (workshops and plenary meetings) for discussion and exchange of information with the view of identifying main priorities and presenting recommendations on specific projects for further cooperation;
- 3) A mechanism to avoid redundancy and duplication in project work in Central Asia and assure that priorities are properly addressed and made known to the international community;
- 4) A network to facilitate co-operation.

Through CGULS, the IAEA will continue to provide technical support when requested for review panels, expert advice, advisory missions and technical backstopping to those organizations requiring assistance in the attempt to resolve these issues.

Input from CGULS will feed into subsequent TC projects at both regional and national levels to build national capacity and support planning and

implementation of remediation activities, enhancing safety and security of these uranium legacy production sites.

The EC is providing resources to the IAEA for CGULS. We very much appreciate this. The IAEA has the appropriate expertise within the technical divisions and this type of activity is well within IAEA mission and mandate. With this initiative, we are happy and proud to serve as a catalyst to facilitate the safe remediation of these radiologically contaminated sites in a manner consistent with international standards and good practices.

I thank-you and look forward to our discussions learning of each other's activities and exploring opportunities for cooperation. It is my sincere desire that by the end of the week we will have a much greater understanding of what each of us can contribute and an agreed upon strategic vision of a coordinated path forward. Let us take advantage of this important opportunity and I wish us every success.

Thank-you