Technical Meeting on Strengthening Radiation Safety Infrastructure in Member States

TM 47106

IAEA HQ, Vienna, Austria

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DDG NS Opening Remarks

Good morning ladies and gentlemen

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Vienna to this Technical Meeting on 'Strengthening Radiation Safety Infrastructure in Member States'.

As you well know, the peaceful applications of radiation technologies bring many benefits to society, such as in medicine, industry, research and agriculture. We also know that a weak regulatory infrastructure for the control of radioactive sources is often a path for these sources slipping out of control, leading to potential accidents or malevolent acts. Unfortunately, this becomes too often a sad reality.

In the majority of cases, radiation sources are utilized in a safe and controlled maner, however accidents have happened leading for example to people being exposed to high levels of radiation, sometimes resulting in death or physical trauma, or to land/property being contaminated. In addition, the inappropriate management of mining and mineral processing of uranium and other materials has resulted in radioactive residues and enhanced levels of radiation in the environment.

In the ideal world, all States would have an effective infrastructure for radiation, transport and waste safety and security. In the real world, while many States do have a good infrastructure for radiation safety, our Radiation Safety Information Management System,

RASIMS, shows that many States need to further strengthen those infrastructures, in some cases, by a considerable amount as Ahmad will show you in his presentation later today.

There is therefore a clear need for Member States to improve their radiation safety and security infrastructure – especially when we consider that decisions from the IAEA Board of Governors and the terms of the Revised Supplementary Agreement[1] make IAEA assistance conditional upon States having an adequate radiation safety infrastructure. For example, a new source for a radiotherapy centre can only be provided under an IAEA project if the recipient State has suitable laws and regulations, and that it has provisions in place for protecting workers, patients and the public. If the recipient State does not have an adequate radiation safety infrastructure then we will work with the State to improve the situation so that the source can be delivered in the future – subject to there being a TC project through which support can be given.

The importance of having an effective national radiation safety infrastructure has been noted by the Standing Advisory Group on Technical Assistance and Cooperation (SAGTAC[2]), this group who reports to our Director General has recommended that strengthening radiation safety should be given a high priority by the Agency.

IAEA has of course been working with Member States for many years on strengthening radiation safety infrastructures. There have been many successes and many improvements, however, as I mentioned earlier many States need to further strengthen their radiation safety infrastructure. Some of those States are new Members of IAEA, some have very low development rates, some have different priorities such as malaria or HIV, some as well have problems with political

[1] Revised Guiding Principles and General Operating Rules to Govern the Provision of Technical Assistance by the Agency INFCIRC/267

[2] The Standing Advisory Group on Technical Assistance and Cooperation (SAGTAC) was established in 1996 to advise the Director General on the Agency's technical cooperation (TC) strategy and policies.

instability, and some just take a long time to address change. I would also like to note that the majority of assistance to Member States in strengthening their radiation safety infrastructure is provided through the Technical Cooperation Programme - which involves close cooperation between the Department of Nuclear Safety & Security and the Department of Technical Cooperation

Taking these points into consideration, the Deputy Director General of the Department of Technical Cooperation and myself called for an ad-hoc joint working group to be established to determine how radiation safety infrastructure can be improved in Member States.

More details on this joint working group will be provided to you later. However, I would like to highlight the first recommended action from the working group which is to encourage Member States to develop and implement a national strategy for strengthening their radiation safety infrastructure in line with a strategic approach to be developed by the Secretariat.

This brings me to the meeting this week – the purpose of which is to develop a strategic approach that would encourage Member States to develop their own national strategy, based on identified needs, for strengthening radiation safety infrastructure in a comprehensive and structured manner, with a special focus on those Member States that receive technical assistance from the IAEA. You are all high-level international experts in the field of radiation safety, so I feel confident that the output of this meeting will be of the highest calibre.

The intention is to submit this strategic approach to the IAEA Policy Making Organs in September for their consideration. To help you in your task, my staff have developed a draft document that I would

kindly ask you to consider as a starting point for your deliberations this week.

Turning to your Chair – it gives me great pleasure to welcome Olga Makarovska who has kindly accepted this challenging position. I believe many of you already know Olga, and agree that she is both knowledgeable and is very well respected by her peers – so I know that you are in excellent hands.

Before passing the floor to Olga, I would like to welcome Ana Claudia Raffo-Caiado, Director of TC's Division of Programme Support and Coordination. Ana is acting DDG for the TC Department this week, and she has kindly agreed to make some opening remarks on behalf of my good friend Kwaku Aning.