

Speech IRPA 11

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in the opening ceremony of IRPA 11 representing the Director General of the IAEA. There is a natural symbiosis between the IAEA and IRPA, the IAEA with its unique role within the UN family of establishing radiation protection standards and providing for their application, and this forum representing the core of the international radiation protection profession. It will therefore also be surprising that the current Chairman of IRPA is the former head of radiation protection at the IAEA, that the previous Chairman was a high level radiation protection officer at the IAEA, and that the current Vice-Chairman has the major responsibility in the IAEA regarding the safe disposal of radioactive waste. The Agency is proud that its current Director of Radiation Safety, Mr. Abel J. González, is the recipient of the Sievert Award here and now at this Conference.

It is also important for the IAEA that this Congress is being held in this attractive country of Spain. The Government of Spain has been one of the largest supporters of the IAEA's radiation protection programme. The last three major radiation protection Conferences of the IAEA took place in the beautiful cities in Andalusia.

It is certainly encouraging to see here so many experts striving for the protection of human beings and their habitat against the damaging effects of ionizing radiation exposure. At a time when scientists are often criticized for penetrating the secrets of life and of matter with little regard for the consequences, it is striking that the scientists who have dealt with ionizing radiation have been conscious from the beginning not only of the positive potential of this phenomenon but also of its risks, and from a very early stage, proceeded on a scientific basis to lay down principles to be observed for radiation safety. Thus a number of unique authoritative international scientific bodies were established, such as ICRP in 1928 and UNSCEAR in 1955. The IAEA was established in 1957 with a unique remit for radiation protection. And finally, the radiation protection professionals came together to form IRPA, this very special organization.

The radiation protection community can feel proud of its success, but will not, I am sure, rest on its laurels, but rather help to further strengthen international cooperation in radiation protection. While success in harmonizing radiation protection standards internationally increases public confidence, failure to achieve harmonization damages this confidence, as we have witnessed during the post-Chernobyl saga. The IAEA has been in the front line in this harmonization process and, with your

help, will continue this endeavour. In this context, it seems to me particularly relevant to undertake a comprehensive review of the BSS, reflecting the new recommendations by ICRP and scientific findings of UNSCEAR, as well as recent discussions in the Agency regarding Action Plans in such areas as Infrastructure, Emergency Response and Environmental Security.

Harmonized standards are, however, the simplest of our challenges. The real difficulty lies in achieving a global, universal, consistent and sustainable application of these standards. All 135 Member States of the IAEA benefit from ionizing radiation for their socio-economic development; as do the more than 65 States that do not have the advantage of IAEA membership. The reason is that the benefits from ionizing radiation are so vast and technology development so fast that their use has grown exponentially. Besides the around 440 nuclear power plants and the nearly 270 research reactors in operation worldwide, many other human endeavours expose people to ionizing radiation. Throughout the world there are over 250 commercial irradiators with large sources of radioactive material and several hundred industrial, research and medical accelerators. Tens of thousands of high activity teletherapy sources are used to cure cancer as are the more than 100,000 brachytherapy sources. Millions of radiation generating apparatuses are used for medical diagnostic purposes, and millions of radioactive sources are used and transported in industry. All these applications need a workforce and, not surprisingly, tens of millions of workers are engaged in these activities and therefore exposed to radiation occupationally.

As can be seen from these statistical numbers, the needs of radiation protection extend far beyond nuclear energy and industry. Significantly, the IAEA's scope of work in this area embraces all aspects of our daily life involving radiation exposure. This is the reason for our strong interest in the future of this discipline. While nuclear energy development appears to be stagnant in most parts of the world, the uses of ionizing radiation are intensively expanding all around the world. Countries with little experience have to regulate complicated activities. Medical doctors not deeply familiar with the complexities of physics have to deal with sophisticated new medical equipment causing radiation exposure. I could continue with a long list of expanding needs for addressing new problems. We need new visions and strategies to deal with these new problems. In fact we need to meet these challenges in a global and sustainable manner. We should not forget that weak links, be they of a geographic or thematic nature, will determine the overall strength of the radiation and nuclear safety regime all around the world. We need continuous improvements in this regime; we need integrated international approaches with a strategic focus on the emerging hot spots; we need to improve internal and external communication; we need closer interaction between you - the experts - and both the public and the political authorities taking decisions; but what we need most is to manage properly the vast amount of

knowledge that exists in this discipline internationally and to foster the exchange of this knowledge by appropriate networking.

From this tribune therefore I call upon the radiation protection community to join forces with the IAEA in a renewed international initiative to strengthen radiation protection infrastructures all over the world. Our programmes are vast and you will be exposed to many of them during this Congress. The main aim, I repeat, should be to improve continuously radiation safety worldwide through networking and interweaving the tremendous amount of information already available so that it be accessed by everyone. The example being set by the Forum of Ibero-American Regulators, of which Spain is a lead player, namely the creation of an Ibero-American network of radiation protection knowledge in order that all Ibero-American countries can share knowledge and learn from each other, is representative of what should be happening in other areas of the world.

We are ready to progress in this direction and hope that IRPA with its extensive membership will be with us.

I wish you a highly successful IRPA 11 Congress.