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Opening Remarks

By

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I wish to begin my brief remarks today by thanking the International Atomic Energy Agency for inviting me to address this symposium. I was honoured to have represented my country on the Agency's Board of Governors, and to serve as its Chairman, when the Agency entered the 21st century—and I am honoured again to be with you today.

The subject of this particular symposium—nuclear security—is of great interest to all UN Member States and has been for many years. Some believe this history dates back to the tragic events of 11 September 2001. Yet concerns over nuclear security of course pre-dated even the establishment of the IAEA—their roots extend back to the original efforts in the early postwar years to advance nuclear disarmament and, later, both to promote and to control the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Nevertheless, nobody can doubt that the Agency's work in nuclear security was profoundly affected by the outpouring of concern—from governments and civil society alike—following the 9/11 experience. The Agency's early responses included its three-year Nuclear Security Plan of Activities, and its current Nuclear Security Plan for 2006-2009. This work has placed a heavy emphasis on training, technical assistance, and improved international coordination. As a result, the world is much better prepared to prevent illicit uses of nuclear material or sabotage at nuclear facilities, and to detect and respond to such activities should they occur.

The world community's positive response to the IAEA's efforts in these and many other areas were quite appropriately recognized when the Agency and its Director General earned the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

Now I am sure that many of the distinguished participants at this symposium have heard the adage that “where you stand depends on where you sit.” From my current vantage point as the UN's High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, I often see some tension in many aspects of my office's work between the general and the particular aspects of any given issue, and I am sure this condition exists at this symposium in various ways.

The speakers who will be addressing us over the next few days come from a wide range of professional disciplines. Some are officials or experts from virtually all levels of government organizations. And our diversity is also reflected in the sheer number of panels at this symposium, and the variety of the subjects under this grand umbrella we call “nuclear security.”

Despite all this diversity, despite all the particular concerns that individual countries may have about conditions at certain facilities—or special problems in the management or transport of nuclear materials in certain locations—we can all easily appreciate that progress in the field of nuclear security is in the interest of all states, indeed all peoples. There may be disagreements on how to best achieve this goal, but there is enormous unity on the objective itself. Why is this?

I believe that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has offered us all an answer. On 21 October last year, he gave a major speech at Harvard University on the subject of “global public goods,” and

three days later, he gave another important address at the UN in which he stated that a world without nuclear weapons would be “a global public good of the highest order.” I think it is quite clear that the reason nuclear security is a subject of such great and growing interest is precisely because it too is a global public good, one that is significantly advanced by multilateral cooperation. When security improves at sensitive nuclear facilities, the benefit is gained not only by the plant’s owners or its workers—but by whole communities, from local and national to potentially global in scope.

What are these concrete benefits? I can think of at least six.

First, improvements in nuclear security contribute to the larger process of global nuclear disarmament, a goal that would be impossible to achieve in a world awash with uncontrolled fissile nuclear materials. For decades, the General Assembly has stressed the need for disarmament agreements to satisfy rigorous criteria relating to verification, transparency, and irreversibility—and to do so through legally binding commitments. By helping enormously in reducing the risk of what journalists call “loose nukes,” nuclear security improvements serve as a confidence-building measure, reassuring states against the dangers from the acquisition or illicit use of nuclear materials. I believe this serves our common disarmament goal.

Second, nuclear security also has important contributions in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, a subject more commonly reserved for IAEA safeguards, which are primarily focused on this goal. Clearly the harder it is for sensitive materials and technology to leave controlled facilities, the greater will be the potential non-proliferation benefit.

Third, nuclear security’s principal contribution is in preventing or reducing the risk of illicit uses of nuclear material, including their theft, sabotage at nuclear facilities, or unauthorized use—all goals that are very high priorities in the post-9/11 security environment.

Fourth, nuclear security is important in promoting peaceful commercial uses of nuclear energy. Enhanced security helps to build public confidence that nuclear facilities and materials will not become security threats to neighbourhoods or entire countries.

Fifth, nuclear security improvements have led to advancements in science and technology—through research and development of new instrumentation, detectors, security devices, and protective measures for nuclear material, among many other fields. For the world to become nuclear-weapon-free, it must have high confidence in the quality of security controls over all nuclear materials that could be used in making nuclear weapons or radiological weapons.

The sixth and final category of benefits relates to issues relating to health, safety, and the environment. These benefits require little elaboration—one needs only to imagine the catastrophic implications in each of these areas should we one day find ourselves in a world without any multilateral standards, norms, or controls in the field of nuclear security.

It is precisely because nuclear security is a global public good—benefitting everybody—that the UN has long supported this goal, along with its efforts over several decades to promote the peaceful uses of atomic energy, as perhaps seen most clearly in our work in hosting and supporting the various meetings and conferences of the states parties of the NPT.

One of the most impressive developments in recent years has been the gradual expansion of the “rule of law” in the field of nuclear security. On the one hand, we at the UN have long been supporting and promoting universal membership in key disarmament and non-proliferation treaties, while other efforts are underway at the IAEA and elsewhere to advance the rule of law in areas relating specifically to the safety and security of nuclear material. These include: the Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (and its 2005 amendments); the Convention on Nuclear Safety; the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident; the Convention on Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident; and the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management.

Landmark developments at the UN concerning the rule of law in this area include the adoption of the International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, the UN Security Council’s Resolution 1540—requiring states to put in place measures to prevent the proliferation and terrorist acquisition of nuclear weapons—and its Resolution 1373, which identified the terrorist risk from the illicit movement of nuclear materials. My own Office for Disarmament Affairs has organized or participated in regional workshops throughout the world to promote full implementation of the obligations of Resolution 1540. We held one last February and three more of such workshops are planned for later this year.

As you now commence your work in this symposium, I would invite you all to recall the words of the IAEA Director General, who warned in his Nobel Peace Lecture in 2005 that “we are in a race against time.” His words apply to the urgency for bold, imaginative, and effective actions to prevent nuclear terrorism and the misuse of nuclear materials, but they are also quite relevant to the need for greater progress in the fields of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

I know that all here today recognize the many benefits that nuclear security can bring both in strengthening international peace and security and in promoting human welfare. In this spirit, please accept my very best wishes for a successful symposium.