Remarks by Mr. Claude Birraux,
President of the OPECST
At the opening ceremony of the IAEA Scientific Forum
on Cancer in Developing Countries
Vienna, 21 September 2010

Director-General,
Excellencies
Distinguished delegates
Honourable participants,

Today, we welcome the IAEA's commitment to fighting cancer, which you, Director-General Amano, have made a political priority. On behalf of the French Government and the French Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Bernard Kouchner, whom I am representing personally this morning, I would like to commend you for making that choice and assure you of France's commitment to working alongside the IAEA to fight this global scourge.

My approach to the topic that has brought us together will be as much scientific as diplomatic. As chairman of the French Parliamentary Office on the Evaluation of Scientific and Technological Choices (OPECST), whose responsibility is to help and define the content of laws on certain topics like nuclear waste management, but also bioethics rules or radiotherapy, I am so pleased to see that the IAEA is fully committed to fighting cancer in developing countries in its support for the medical use of atomic radiation. In this bringing of nuclear energy and nuclear medicine closer I see a necessary and desirable evolution that the OPECST has been advocating in France for years.

When looking at what this effort of applying industry experience to medicine should entail, I believe that it could be guided by a principle that perfectly addresses the concern of covering the largest number of needs involved in fighting cancer in developing countries: the principle of optimization.

This principle has been legally binding in Europe recommending the lowest possible dose of ionising radiation in order to be effective in terms of treatment. A patient should be treated but without going beyond what is strictly necessary.

This means effective treatment that prevents relapses as a result of excessive radiation exposure. But this also means the most appropriate use of energy and financial resources, which are so important when they are limited. For developing countries, the principle of optimization works to the advantage of victims and

national health systems alike, by broadening their means of intervention to the greatest extent possible.

With this in mind, cooperation efforts to distribute radiation means to the greatest extent possible in developing countries should be based on two pillars: training and technology.

Training first. Education and training is of course paramount in ensuring best pratices. It is also essential in enabling the use of the most appropriate radiation instruments to address patients' needs.

A more extensive knowledge of medical physics will allow for sharper control of treatment techniques. In this regard, I have observed that a school in my constituency, the European School of Medical Physics, whose courses are taught in English and which benefits from being located near the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) when it comes to recruiting teaching staff, has students enrolled from all over the world every year.

Technology can also help us move towards improved compliance of the principle of optimization ~~a~~nd I would like to mention in this regard the gradual development of hadron therapy.

Fighting cancer is a major national cause. Since 2003, France has had an ambitious national cancer plan and the President of the French Republic wanted its second stage, launched in 2009, to include specific action devoted to international cooperation, notably through support for training programmes.

International partnerships have proved to be indispensable tools in the fight against cancer. We need to avoid patchy and duplicate actions and optimize resources, which are by definition limited, given the wide-ranging needs.

Thanks to our national experience, we are aware, Director-General Amano, that the approach the IAEA has developed is very appropriate. Being both comprehensive and progressive, it puts training of the entire chain of healthcare professionals, the chain of life, at the heart of its strategy.

To conclude, I believe that we can but welcome the firm commitment of the IAEA in helping to come up with a collective and solidarity-based response at a global level.

Thank you.