

STATEMENT BY THE HEAD OF THE ARGENTINE DELEGATION
Ministerial Level Conference on Nuclear Safety

AS DELIVERED ON MONDAY 20TH JUNE 2011

Thank you very much, Mr. President

At the opening of my speech, I would like to express the satisfaction of Argentina in seeing a prominent diplomat of our sister Republic of Brazil preside this Conference.

To comply with the timelines, I shall read an abridged version of the Argentine official statement. The full text, which comprehensively reflects the position of my country, is available in English and Spanish for the minutes of the Conference.

Mr. President:

Undoubtedly, the nuclear accident at the Fukushima plant has been a tragedy for the Japanese people, even more because it conjoined the misfortune caused by the earthquake and the later tsunami. Historically, our country has hosted a vast Japanese immigration that has successfully integrated into the Argentine community. Our people, therefore, have shared the anguish and suffering of the Japanese people caused by these disasters. Our Government has already expressed, and once again reiterates its full solidarity with Japan and has transmitted through official channels its condolences and offers of help.

This painful episode shows dramatically how important the pillar of nuclear safety is. My delegation urges the Secretariat to make every effort to adequately meet its responsibilities in carrying out these functions, which should not suffer any detriment in relation to other work areas of the Agency, including those related to nuclear security. In this regard, Argentina is confident that the Director General, Dr. Yukiya Amano, will know how to achieve and maintain an appropriate work balance in the Secretariat's tasks.

In 2004, long before it became commonplace to talk of a "nuclear renaissance", the Argentine government decidedly re-launched its nuclear program in our country. The decision to complete the Atucha-II NPP is, perhaps, the clearest symbol of this policy. Argentina is a nuclear country, and considers that the advantages and prospects that nuclear energy offers (especially environmental and safety) are still valid today.

In this significant path of nuclear development, it has emphasized, at all times, the commitment of the national program to the highest safety standards. This will remain one of the characteristic features of the nuclear activity in my country.

In particular, a strong monitoring and enforcement activity has been present in this process. The regulatory responsibilities have always been effectively separated from promotional activities, and for more than 16 years it has perfected its full legal and administrative independence. The regulatory body in Argentina depends directly from the country's highest authority, that is, our President, and is endowed with extensive powers to control the nuclear activity throughout Argentina.

Mr. President:

I wish to express my delegation's support to all activities covered by the Conference in the framework of our traditional spirit of collaboration that transcends our differences on its organization.

In this spirit, we would note, under these circumstances, the overall objective of the Conference, (Quote) "[...] to draw on the lessons from the accident at the Fukushima Dai-ichi NPP in order to strengthen nuclear safety throughout the world" (End quote) is, in our view, difficult to achieve. In our opinion the possibility of attaining this goal is significantly constrained because the affected nuclear reactors have not been yet unequivocally declared under control and, consequently, we cannot have a comprehensive synopsis of the causes and consequences of the accident. We also wonder if we don't run the risk of prejudging by indicating we will resort to any ensuing lessons to strengthen nuclear safety throughout the world [sic] when, perhaps, it might be enough to strengthen nuclear safety of specific plants in a situation similar to those involved in the accident.

The challenge that faces the thorough analysis of the Fukushima accident requires us to seek scientifically the causes of the accident and avoid drawing premature conclusions that could hinder nuclear development worldwide, as it is already happening in some countries.

What is needed now is full disclosure, technical accuracy, political calm, and deep retrospection. The emotional or non-professional reactions will neither help the Japanese people nor the rest of the world. Argentina has argued before various international fora that any hasty reaction would be undesirable, especially if it happens before the availability of a consolidated, relevant, comprehensive and detailed explanation of the circumstances surrounding the accident.

From this perspective, we present three sets of considerations:

In the first place:

- We believe that the immediate ethical challenge for Japan and the international community is conducting a thorough investigation of the root causes of the accident, and an objective assessment of its consequences. This is a *sine-qua-non* condition for an objective consideration of the possible lessons to be learned, and of who may benefit from those lessons.
- We consider it inappropriate that some circles have prematurely pronounced critical opinions on the measures taken by the Japanese authorities after the tragedy. I have no doubt that the authorities sought to do the best for their people, under the severe prevailing circumstances. My delegation deems premature certain assessments as to whether the consequences of the accident were properly mitigated or not by local authorities, taking into account that the decisions were taken under circumstances of extreme stress.

- Viewing it superficially, it seems that the only cause responsible for the accident was the double natural catastrophic event that lashed north-eastern Japan. If a more profound and retrospective examination is made, given the available preliminary evidence, it would appear that the accident occurred because the plant was not located or designed according to prevalent international safety standards, and also because its regulatory supervision was apparently insufficient.
- The accident should not be used as an argument to affirm that nuclear energy is inherently insecure, and much less to encourage the early withdrawal from the much-needed nuclear renaissance in the developing world. The accident is a burden for the nuclear safety of NPP's located and/or designed in similar conditions to the ones that suffered that accident, but nuclear safety should not become a problem for the rest of the world.

Secondly:

- Nuclear suppliers should avoid using the incident as a commercial argument to further their own nuclear plant designs in demerit of others.
- In this sense, we must not fall into the trap of promoting, explicitly or implicitly, safety conditions that favour a certain nuclear reactor design at the expense of others. The sovereign opinion of each Member State, properly substantiated, shall always prevail in these matters.

Thirdly:

- Until we have a comprehensive report of the reasons for the accident, Argentina is not willing to hastily embark on a review of any legally binding international agreement on nuclear safety, to which Argentina has committed its full adherence and compliance, or of the functions and activities of the IAEA in nuclear safety.

Mr. President:

Unfortunately, international events seem to be taking a different path, and that worries us, especially when we are discussing measures to be taken in the framework of the IAEA. In this regard, Argentina will always join consensus on courses or action plans that are technically sound, relevant and quantitative, and adopted following a comprehensive and informed international discussion.

Regarding the thorough investigation of the causes of the Fukushima accident, we see with great concern, a departure from the IAEA's successful experience in monitoring the Chernobyl accident.

That approach proved how difficult it is to assess, with authority, the causes and consequences of a serious nuclear accident. A few months after Chernobyl, the IAEA organized in Vienna a high-level meeting to assess in detail the accident, to which it summoned qualified specialists from around the world, including top experts from the former Soviet Union.

In the aftermath of the accident, the IAEA, with the co-sponsorship of all relevant organizations of the United Nations family, launched the so-called "Chernobyl Project" and "Chernobyl Forum", which produced, after years of hard work of numerous scientists from many countries, including Argentina, a solidly based final report on the consequences of the accident.

From this perspective, we believe that the current approach of missions with a duration limited to a few days, will not bridge the epistemological gap, and, probably, a Ministerial Conference like this one does not suffice to produce and direct the necessary solutions.

With regard to IAEA's safety-related duties, I would like to reiterate first our unwavering support to the Agency's relevant statutory provisions, i.e. those permitting the IAEA to establish safety standards, and provide for their application at the request of States. We reiterate the Argentine commitment to the international nuclear safety regime that has been built under the aegis of the IAEA. Since the establishment of the international standard system half a century ago, we have been fully involved not only in the development of the standards, but, also, in their implementation.

Argentina wishes to reiterate its support to the IAEA's safety-related statutory functions, in the framework of strict compliance with these statutory requirements. Our goal is not passive acceptance but active improvement of the implementation of these functions by the Secretariat.

In this regard, we have repeated once and again at the Board of Governors that both IAEA's standards and their application should be quantitative, objective, measurable and comparable, and that all qualifying subjectivism, whether in the formulation of the standards or in their implementation, should be avoided. Unfortunately, the tendency has been different in recent years. Moreover, we have also stressed the need for the standards to be co-sponsored by the competent organs of the United Nations and the related specialized agencies, as required by the Statute.

We believe that the preliminary assessments of the accident in Japan are proving the veracity of our statements regarding standards and qualitative services.

An example of how dangerous a qualitative approach can turn out to be is given by some of the services offered for the application of the standards provided by the IAEA to Japan before the accident. One such service, before the Fukushima accident, had reached three main conclusions and even the identification of best practices in areas questioned today:

- 1. Japan has in place a comprehensive national government legal regulatory framework for nuclear safety.*
- 2. The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), as the regulatory body, has an important role in directing and coordinating the development of the regulatory framework.*
- 3. Steps have already been taken toward improving the relations between NISA, the nuclear industry and the stakeholders.*

The service also identified "best practices" including the following:

1. *NISA's relationship management program is comprehensive and well structured.*
2. *Regulations and standards pertinent to license granting and accreditation requests have been clearly established.*
3. *Operating experience for major events has been thorough, and appropriate countermeasures have been applied to the licensees.*

We encourage the Secretariat to confront these findings with the reality emphasized by the accident, for a better and beneficial understanding of our concerns.

To sum up, we underline that the weaknesses in the international nuclear safety situation are not only observed in the absence of quantitative, objective, measurable and comparable IAEA standards, but also in the non-compliance with the standards, both by the industry's practice as well as in the regulatory action.

My Government continues to support, as it has for the past half century, the international nuclear safety regime, but emphasises that it should not depart from the following essential characteristics:

- It should consist of quantitative objective, measurable and comparable, adopted by consensus among all sovereign Member States, non-binding and prepared with the joint participation of pertinent organizations of the United Nations System.
- The mechanisms whereby the Secretariat provides for the implementation of standards must be rigorous and strictly not qualitative.
- It should not promote industrial interests of technology-supplier States.

I will conclude my statement by reiterating our understanding and offer of assistance to the Japanese authorities and our untiring commitment to the nuclear safety-related role of the IAEA.