

Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety

Statement Delivered by Ms. Dana Drábová

CZECH REPUBLIC

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all let me join previous speakers and on behalf of the Czech delegation express our deepest condolences, sympathy and solidarity to the people of Japan for the tragic loss of human life and property caused by the March earthquake and the subsequent tsunami. I would like to assure you that the Czech Republic remains ready to provide our Japanese colleagues any kind of assistance they may find useful. Our message is simple: “Have courage Japan, we stand by you.”

Mr. President,

after the accident in Fukushima, nuclear power finds itself again at a crossroads; and again, its future role in our energy mix is extensively scrutinized. The international community is facing two relatively simple basic questions:

- What are the lessons to be learned from the Fukushima accident?
- How should we respond to it?

Taking into account the fact that the accident is still in progress and much difficult work is required to bring the plant under full control, we have only preliminary observations concerning the possible lessons learnt. On one hand we can see, unfortunately enough in reality and not in sophisticated computer simulation, that nuclear power plants are capable of withstanding some catastrophic natural events better than many other manmade objects. On the other hand, it appears that in siting and design of the Fukushima-Daiichi plant an unlikely combination of low probability external hazards was not taken sufficiently into account. In addition, the unprecedented natural disaster took emergency responders outside the range of circumstances for which they were trained and equipped.

There are three basic pillars of the safe use of nuclear energy in the Czech Republic whose proper balance is crucial:

- Well defined regulatory framework, legislation, competent and independent regulatory body;
- Well-developed nuclear infrastructure including competent license holders with primary responsibility for safety;
- International cooperation and harmonization of regulatory and industry approaches.

We recognize that, despite of the high level of safety of our nuclear power plants, it is important to learn any relevant lessons from the Fukushima accident and to take relevant actions and measures aiming for continuous improvement of safety in line with the

fundamental principle of nuclear safety. In order to achieve their maximum efficiency and effectiveness, it is essential to keep the debate at the professional and expert level as well as to use sound scientific background and engineering judgment. However, we should fairly and openly think about what action is really beneficial and why, and in the end we should find the most efficient way how to implement it.

Our response to the Fukushima accident should be focused on the measures promising real safety gains, without unnecessary symbolic steps and gestures. Here I would like to mention the EU “stress tests” of nuclear installations that seemed to be rather a gesture at the beginning. However, now they present potentially constructive steps to real improvement of nuclear safety. The Czech Republic, after its active participation in developing and reformulating their scope, fully supports them. Nevertheless, it should be born in mind that the safety of a particular nuclear installation is made up of many interlocking pieces, like a jigsaw puzzle. It is a network of safety measures that have to be viewed as a whole. Any complex evaluation cannot be performed without deep knowledge and day to day contact with the installation and legal and regulatory framework around it. From this it is clear that the ability to judge effectively on overall safety level of a particular nuclear installation is only with the national regulator.

Let me just add that the achievement of the high level of nuclear safety for every nuclear installation is declared by both operators and responsible state administration as an overriding general objective in each and every country. So, what does it really mean to say “a high level of nuclear safety (with sufficient margins)”? Nuclear safety cannot be quantified or measured/assessed objectively; having no absolute yardstick. When evaluating safety, there is always a subjective component – influenced by each individual’s or group’s perceptions. How to overcome this fact and embed this rather declarative term into operative paragraphs of a legal norm? Is the full harmonization at the level of technical standards necessary prerequisite? These are some of the most significant questions to be answered.

Mr. President,

also previous speakers have already emphasized that nuclear safety is not a national or regional issue but has a global dimension. Therefore, all activities aiming to increase safety of nuclear power plants should be dealt with primarily at the international level within the IAEA, and other professional and competent institutions and platforms, enabling the most effective exchange/sharing of necessary experience, information, knowledge and scientific and technical know-how.

Before concluding my statement I would like to mention that my country, through its Nuclear Regulatory Authority - State Office for Nuclear Safety - participated very actively in the preparation and adoption of current actions at international level and remains ready to play an active role in developing, implementing and evaluating further steps towards the improvement of nuclear safety worldwide.

I thank you, Mr. President.