

CANUE VERSTOD

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

IAEA Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety

Statement of Austria


**H.E. Vice Chancellor and Federal Minister for European and
International Affairs
Dr. Michael Spindelegger**

Vienna, 21 June 2011

Dear Mr. President,
Dear Director General,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a sad, but, timely occasion that brings us together here. Sad since nuclear technology has once again spun out of control after the terrible earthquake and tsunami, destroying lives, livelihoods, infrastructures and threatening the health of too many. Timely since we have to act now and we have to implement appropriate measures now. I would therefore like to call upon all of us – governments, international institutions and organisations, non-governmental organisations, academia – to implement concrete measures in the foreseeable future regarding enhanced nuclear safety, improvements in nuclear incident and accident management as well as in nuclear information policy overall.

In this regard, I wholeheartedly welcome other processes that contribute to this endeavour. These include the European Council's decision to undertake comprehensive and transparent safety assessments (so-called "stress tests") of all nuclear power plants in the EU including the publication and comparison of results with others. I also welcome the outcome of the G-8 meeting in Deauville and the OECD Ministerial Meeting in Paris. Likewise, this very conference will also mandate the IAEA to elaborate together with Member States an Action Plan to address the pressing issues that have become so evident after the Fukushima accident. It has also made evident the need for cooperation and data exchange among different organisations. In this regard, the scientific data provided by the CTBTO monitoring stations have greatly contributed to the speedy assessment of the event.

The context of our immediate and future action is clear: 25 years after the Chernobyl disaster we have to acknowledge that we are still not able to control nuclear installations and their radioactive releases under all circumstances. I would like to honour the victims of the catastrophe caused by the terrible earthquake, the ensuing tsunami and the nuclear accident. Our support and our thoughts go out to the Japanese people that have once again endured a tragic catastrophe and shown extreme bravery and serenity in coping with it. At the same time, let me also pay respect to the governments of Germany and Switzerland regarding their clear-cut decisions to phase out nuclear energy in the not too distant future. It is such bold policy changes that we need alongside a new global energy policy. 

Mr. President,

Let me outline some further thoughts and concrete ideas in detail. I would also like to mention that Austria has contributed a working paper to foster the development of what we see as the beginning of a process. We cannot and should not shy away from asking difficult questions and finding clear answers to them. Let me thus refer to our vision of an overall result oriented approach in the aftermath of Fukushima.

Enhanced nuclear safety has to build upon lessons from the Fukushima catastrophe, and the lessons from the comprehensive risk and safety assessments of the nuclear power plants conducted by the European Union and other countries. Thus, the Special meeting of Contracting Parties to the IAEA Convention on Nuclear Safety has

to bring about a more robust legal regime, including a comprehensive control mechanism.

On the basis of such a profound understanding and insight, stringent new measures should be designed as well as existing ones strengthened. Austria would suggest preparing for a substantial process of amending the IAEA Convention on Nuclear Safety, the last amendments to which were made in 1996, and other related IAEA conventions, namely the Convention pertaining to Emergency Preparedness as well as the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident and the Convention on Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency. Such amendments should entail rendering IAEA safety standards binding for all contracting parties, updating safety objectives contained in the convention, introducing strict criteria in order to ensure regulatory independence, and considerably strengthening provisions in the Conventions pertaining to emergency preparedness.

In particular, I would like to reiterate the Austrian suggestion of implementing mandatory independent safety visits to nuclear power plants, building on the experiences gained from OSART, and for adopting appropriate criteria for launching such visits. These criteria could include an emergency of the scale of INES 3 as well as on site random verification of national safety report statements, both of which would be referred to in an additional implementing protocol to the Convention on Nuclear Safety. It goes without saying that the effectiveness of such a new and enhanced legal regime would depend on the widest possible adherence to these Conventions.

More precise and timely notification and response obligations in case of a nuclear incident and accident are essential. More has to be done to ensure adequate information of the public and the provision of timely recommendations for protective measures. In order to allow for exchanging views on possible best practices in this regard, it is my pleasure to invite Member States, the IAEA Secretariat as well as representatives of international organisations to participate in an expert meeting to be held at the new Nuclear Information Centre of the Nuclear Engineering Seibersdorf Ltd in autumn. Our main focus would be to judge "an accident anywhere as an accident everywhere", and in view of this taking into consideration the legitimate concerns of the wider public. As witnessed, every member of society was faced with a situation of lack of or inadequate information with all its negative consequences.

Let me also turn to the question of nuclear liability. Any liability regime has to protect potential victims, and to this end ensure sufficient coverage of any damages, provide for choice of jurisdiction to be made by victims and for compensation that is not to be restricted to the operator. An overhaul of the current system as constituted by the Vienna Convention on Third Party Nuclear Liability and the Paris Convention on Third party Nuclear Liability is required since these two conventions designate liability coverage per nuclear site and accident that is ridiculous in size when compared to damages incurred at Fukushima. In fact, the size of liability coverage should be regarded as a subsidy for the nuclear industry, since in comparison not a single car would be put into circulation with such proportional insurance coverage.

Mr. President,

Let me conclude by saying that in the opinion of the Austrian Federal Government, it is time to take a wider energy policy approach for the future. Nuclear energy

management does not allow for complacency, and we should learn from the catastrophe in looking ahead. In this regard, we should be able to think of a world without nuclear power. As a consequence, we have to assess whether nuclear power will be needed in a longer term perspective to address our energy demand and whether it will be competitive from an economic point of view. Why would we not focus on renewable energy sources available in abundance, and even cheaper than the high risk nuclear technology?

The energy mix of the 21st and 22nd centuries will have to look different, reflecting the full costs attached to the use of nuclear energy thus making it much less competitive as it seemingly is now. Thus, going much further in energy efficiency and energy reduction, investing much more in research and development of sustainable energy forms and their timely application, and drawing up a global energy plan of the future which include risk assessments and their valorisation would be important steps in this direction.

Thank You, Mr. President.