

Germany's statement in the plenary session

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At the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety*

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President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I.

On behalf of my government, I congratulate you on your election to the important office of President of the IAEA Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety. I would like to assure you of the full support of the German delegation in the successful accomplishment of your challenging task.

The German delegation would also like to commend the Director General for initiating and organizing this conference, thus recognizing the vital importance of nuclear safety for any peaceful use of nuclear power in the future.

In the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in March this year and in the face of the tremendous challenges to be addressed, we express our solidarity with the Japanese delegation and offer our full support to our colleagues.

Let me assure you: even though Germany is phasing out nuclear energy, we remain committed to cooperating on all levels in order to contribute actively to the highest standards of nuclear safety in Europe and throughout the world. We will share all our experience and competence in order to realise our key objective: the prevention of any further nuclear accident or event with severe consequences.

At this Conference we should start with the development of a “comprehensive Action Plan” to determine and coordinate actions to strengthen the Global Nuclear Safety and Security Regime. Such an Action Plan should be presented and agreed at the forthcoming IAEA General Conference in September this year.

II.

Learning lessons from the accidents at Three Mile Island in 1979 and Chernobyl in 1986, we jointly established the Global Nuclear Safety and Security Regime. But this regime was not implemented effectively enough to prevent the disaster at the Fukushima site. The nuclear

consequences of the disastrous earthquake in Japan are regarded by many as a turning point – not only for Japan, but for the entire world. Each of us has to reconsider the situation.

The German government, the German political parties and the German public have launched an intensive discussion of the lessons to be learned from the Fukushima accident. This accident increased doubts within large parts of the general public and policy makers if nuclear energy can be a sustainable and safe contributor to the energy supply in Germany in the future. We have seen that events that were deemed highly improbable can still happen. After experiencing such a turning point, it was only logical to question our society's previous assessment of the acceptable risks and resolutely face up to the consequent challenges. There is cross-party consensus that Germany should phase out nuclear power within one decade and move to a predominantly renewable energy supply as quickly as possible.

Immediately after Fukushima, strategic political decisions were taken: we have taken our oldest nuclear power plants (commissioned before 1980) from the grid and have pledged to ensure that all 17 of our nuclear power plants undergo a strict safety review, especially on robustness against beyond design events. Furthermore, two commissions were asked for advice: The Reactor Safety Commission, which advises the Federal Environment Ministry on nuclear safety matters, has drawn up a rigorous review programme, including external as well as man-made hazards. Moreover, a new Ethics Commission has been established to give advice on economic, ecological and social questions of a phase out of nuclear power.

On June 6, the cabinet decided that eight reactors which are now offline shall not restart. The remaining 9 reactors will be shut down step by step, and by the end of 2022, all 17 nuclear power plants will be permanently shut down.

III.

At European level, in March 2011 the European Council concluded that the safety of all EU nuclear power plants should be reviewed on the basis of a comprehensive and transparent risk and safety assessment (stress tests). As decided at European level, Germany initiated the stress test programme, as requested and specified by an agreement between the European Regulators Group (ENSREG) and the European Commission. Every country which is already using or planning to use nuclear energy – inside or outside the EU - should join these stress

test efforts. The European Commission will also take actions to clarify how malevolent acts such as terrorism can and will be addressed in the stress tests.

IV.

All countries which use nuclear energy must be aware of their responsibility which does not end at national borders. The continuous improvement of safety in order to secure the highest standards of nuclear safety must be our universally shared goal. Countries which are going to construct a new nuclear power plant have the opportunity to apply best available safety technologies from the outset. Let me be quite clear: a new nuclear power plant must be capable of managing core meltdown and preventing major releases. This applies to all countries which have opted for nuclear power - those already using it and those planning to build their first nuclear power plant.

Germany acknowledges the right of all states to choose nuclear energy for civil purposes. If a country opts for the use of nuclear energy, the adequate infrastructure must be in place. Of particular importance is a strong, independent regulatory body with adequate legal competence and human and financial resources. We appreciate the efforts of the IAEA and other international fora to enhance nuclear safety through international cooperation, and I would like to underline once again: Germany remains committed to international safety cooperation.

V.

Cooperation among governments, regulatory bodies, research institutions and industry is as crucial as the transparent exchange of knowledge. All these cooperation options and the importance of joint nuclear safety research are key elements for the global development of a nuclear safety culture which is in the direct security interests of all states.

For strengthening the Global Nuclear Safety and Security Regime, we strongly recommend short term and medium term actions.

- Short term actions can be taken immediately at national level by coordinating and optimizing existing instruments. An example: preparing the extraordinary meeting of the Convention on Nuclear Safety, we must provide clear guidance for enhanced national reports, and the "questions and answers" process must rely on comprehensive and systematic evaluations, thus promoting more substantial reviews and conclusions during the review meetings.

- Regarding medium term actions, the effectiveness of all existing international nuclear conventions has to be reviewed thoroughly and revised if appropriate. The same applies to giving a more binding character to international safety standards and requirements. Where necessary, adjustments have to be made.

The Secretariat and we, the Member States should use the present opportunity to initiate a broad review process as part of the overall master plan.

Let me turn to the field of emergency preparedness:

Fukushima has shown that the complexity of the accident and the immense cost and effort of dealing with such a disaster requires that all countries give the accident state coordinated support based on adequate international conventions.

Modern communication media have led to a global increase in the public demand for information. There are one or two Internet information platforms, of both national and international organisations, which have met this demand. Nevertheless, we still need a new, joint strategy for linking competent authorities. This will allow states – including the accident state – to effectively, promptly and competently transfer information on the status of an accident and the measures being taken, and to present the public with an assessment of the environment and of the damaged power plants.

I have my doubts as to whether the Conventions on Early Notification and Assistance, which were established as an international reaction immediately after Chernobyl, can, in their current form, meet the requirements of crisis management or crisis communication. For this reason, we need to strengthen the goals in the field of "nuclear emergency preparedness and response" by improving the Convention on Early Notification. A revised Convention should address:

- "the responsibility of governments for timely and sufficient measures on accident prevention (on-site and off-site emergency preparedness) and management,
- including the adjustment of procedures for coordinated information exchange."

Furthermore, a „peer review mechanism for emergency between the competent authorities" is needed, and should also be a part of the extended/improved Early Notification Convention.

President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To sum up my remarks: it is obvious that the safe use of nuclear energy requires intensive international collaboration. The IAEA plays a central role in this regard. A comprehensive Action Plan is needed. This Conference should provide input and define key elements and the steps forward.

We look forward to continuing our constructive cooperation with the Agency and with all Member States which are actively addressing our common challenges.

Thank you very much your attention.