

**IAEA Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety,
Vienna, 20-24 June 2011**

National Statement by Ireland

Mr. President,

May I first congratulate you on taking on the task of presiding over this important Conference, and assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation.

I would also like to commend you, Director General Amano for your decision to organise this conference, as an important demonstration by the international community of our collective will to learn from the accident at Fukushima, to strengthen emergency management, preparedness and response; and to launch a process of reviewing and strengthening the global nuclear safety network. You can be assured of Ireland's full and active support for the Agency in meeting these challenges.

The measure of the success of this conference will be acceptance by the public that it has fulfilled its ambition. There can be no complacency on the issue of nuclear safety. We must clearly show the international community's commitment to strive for the highest levels of nuclear safety.

I would like to express my country's deepest sympathies to the people of Japan for the extraordinary loss of life and destruction caused by the earthquake and tsunami that struck that country on 11 March 2011 and which also caused the catastrophic accident at Fukushima Dai-ichi. We must not forget in our discussions here the very real implications our work will have for others potentially facing similar crises in the future.

I would also wish to pay tribute to the extraordinary courage and determination of those working at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant since the accident, to bring the plant under control, as well as the response of the Japanese authorities.

Ireland strongly values the vital and unique role the IAEA plays in promoting safe, secure and peaceful nuclear technologies. The importance of its mission will further increase in the

years ahead as new demands, technologies and challenges arise. Ireland remains committed to working with the Agency and with other member states in attaining our common goals.

We welcome the reports presented by the IAEA International fact-finding mission to Japan, as well as that of the Japanese authorities, which will provide an important basis for our ongoing work in understanding this accident, and in ensuring that lessons are applied for a stronger and more effective global system of nuclear safety.

Ireland attaches utmost importance to the benefits of a collective and multilateral approach to matters of nuclear safety, and the role of the IAEA in this regard. Given the potential risks to human health and the environment that nuclear energy presents, and the trans-boundary implications of a nuclear accident, or a failure in the transport of radioactive materials, the IAEA provides an essential framework for cooperative efforts to build and strengthen the international nuclear safety regime to the highest possible levels.

One of the key areas we must look at is how to strengthen the Agency in this role – both its mandate and its capabilities, in nuclear safety and emergency preparedness and response. We rely on the Agency for timely information, analysis and assistance in the face of such an accident, and we must give the Agency the ability to provide this service.

Equally, we need ongoing cooperation between the Agency and relevant international organisations, be that the WHO, WMO or the CTBTO, in areas of nuclear safety, emergency preparedness and response. Effective inter-agency cooperation is needed to ensure all relevant expertise is brought to bear, and international action in these areas is coherent and effective.

Safety standards and practices are best supported and enhanced by international peer review and the sharing of knowledge, both of which are well served by IAEA programmes and mechanisms and its practical assistance to Member States. We should look at how to give the Agency a further enhanced mandatory role in safety oversight of facilities, based on these mechanisms.

We believe that IAEA safety standards must be applied universally as minimum national safety standards.

Given that nuclear safety remains in the first instance a national responsibility, states should ensure that they have in place a strong nuclear safety infrastructure, underpinned by effective independent, competent and authoritative regulation.

Transparency, at national and regional levels, in the operation of nuclear facilities, is paramount, especially in the event of an accident, and provides greater confidence in the safe use of nuclear energy.

We need to reassess the definition of risk in looking at nuclear facilities. The International fact-finding mission is clear that there was an underestimate of risk in the case of Fukushima. Nuclear facilities must be ready to deal with severe external hazards that would carry catastrophic consequences for life, property and the environment. This applies also to relatively rare or unlikely hazards or combinations of hazards.

In addressing radiological protection we need to evaluate the actions taken to limit radiation exposure of the population, and the assessment of occupational and public radiation doses and planned remedial measures.

We must also look at the wider legal framework and seek to strengthen it, where it proves necessary, including in the area of nuclear liability.

Ireland welcomes and strongly supports the Ministerial Declaration adopted by exclamation yesterday evening. This is just a beginning: effective and prompt follow-up on the areas set out in the Declaration must now be a priority for the Agency and for each of our governments.

Thank you, Mr President.