

IAEA Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety (20-24 June 2011)

Speech by Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas
Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania

Dear Director General,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is very timely initiative by the International Atomic Energy Agency and I would like to thank for the work, which was done in organizing this important conference. Let me first of all to express our sympathy and solidarity with Japanese people so bravely coping with the earthquake and tsunami caused tragedy and the accident in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

Also we all still remember Chernobyl tragedy. Both cases clearly demonstrate dual nature of nuclear energy, which can bring not only huge benefits, but also potential threats. It is obvious that even low probability accidents happens, having transboundary impact and we have to be prepared for even theoretical threats and challenges.

Numerous new nuclear reactors are planned or are already under construction worldwide. Therefore, the implementation of IAEA nuclear safety standards should be the priority of each member state, developing or planning to develop nuclear programmes. Nuclear Safety Convention is very important document, though this international instrument needs to be revised and adopted to new challenges.

Lack of strict regulation creates possible threats also when life of nuclear power reactors is extended. After the catastrophe of Chernobyl some of functioning old RBMK type nuclear power reactors were also considered as being unsafe. All those plants are functioning till now – 25 years after the tragedy.

Since 1983 Lithuania has also developed nuclear energy programme. Despite huge investments to improve nuclear safety, soviet-type RBMK reactors of Ignalina NPP were considered as unsafe and Lithuania has committed to permanently shut-down the NPP in 2009. By developing a new regional nuclear power plant Lithuania follows all international requirements. Potential site – positively evaluated by

International Atomic Energy Agency. Our position is clear: for safer future we have to implement even non-obligatory nuclear safety recommendations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During this conference there were presented many good and interesting ideas on how to improve the nuclear safety. Yesterday we heard about the advantages on advanced nuclear technologies. Indeed, it is a step in the right direction and a sign of great progress. However, the safety of technology is closely interrelated with the safety of site and should be treated as a complex issue. Very safe technology must be located in very safe site. Lithuania and other countries of our region already expressed its worries about two nuclear projects being developed in our direct neighbourhood, one of them being only 50 km from our capital Vilnius, mainly due to the lack of transparency, lack of essential information, especially on site selection criteria. New NPPs cannot be even considered without comprehensive seismic safety assessment (including seismic, geological engineering geotechnical assessment). Such risk factors as hydrologically sensitive areas, international air transport corridors should be considered as well.

During the review meeting of Nuclear Safety Convention in Vienna this April countries stressed that a final decision on site of new NPP should be made only in close cooperation with neighbour countries and stated the need to review site selection requirements according to the IAEA Safety Standards, in particular taking into account natural disasters and the likely safety impact of a planned nuclear installation on individuals, society and the environment. International community should learn from Fukushima accident and do not plan new NPPs near densely populated areas, especially national capitals of other countries, without adherence to the Agency's requirements, without IAEA evaluation of potential sites, without an agreement from the affected country. One of the IAEA safety fundamental states that benefits, the facilities yield, must outweigh the radiation risk, to which they give rise. Close vicinity to the national capital of other country has to be regarded as insurmountable difficulty for the implementation of emergency planning measures.

It is obvious that lower level of nuclear safety enables lower cost of construction and cheaper electricity generation. However, it may also mean serious casualties in the future. Therefore, it is a high time to start creating a new nuclear safety environment.

European Council conclusions of 24-25 March 2011 is valuable and timely step forward. Lithuania especially welcomes European Union commitment to extend the

“stress-tests” not only to the European Union nuclear power plants and projects, but also to the neighbouring countries. However, this is only first step and should be followed by engagement and cooperation by neighbouring countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a crucial time to make decisive steps towards more safe future. In this regard we welcome and fully support the concrete proposals of the IAEA Director General Y. Amano to strengthen the nuclear safety in all aspects and appreciate the work of its highly experienced experts. We expect these proposals will be a valuable part of the Action Plan. Also Lithuania suggests that the following principles were included in the Plan:

- Every country engaged in nuclear energy programmes should follow strict and uniform ^{IAEA} nuclear safety standards, including establishment of truly independent regulatory body.
- The role of International Atomic Energy Agency should be strengthened in ensuring nuclear safety throughout the world.
- The Agency’s safety standards should be revised, strengthened and be transposed into national laws for all engaged countries.
- Evaluation of sites for the new NPPs by IAEA should become obligatory.
- International legal framework, including Nuclear Safety Convention, should be revised and adopted to new challenges. Effective dispute settlement mechanism encompassing all aspects of nuclear energy development should be created.

Thank You for Your attention.