

# IAEA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON NUCLEAR SAFETY

21-25 JUNE 2011, VIENNA

## DRAFT NEW ZEALAND STATEMENT

Mr President

Congratulations on your appointment as President of this important Conference. There are high expectations resting on this international process that we are collectively starting. I assure you of New Zealand's full support as you guide us towards concrete and forward-looking outcomes of our meeting.

Our heartfelt condolences are with the people of Japan whose courage and fortitude in the aftermath of the 11 March earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident aroused admiration in us all. Less than one month earlier Japan responded generously to New Zealand's own tragic earthquake. Extreme situations like these test our resilience but demonstrate and strengthen close bonds between countries and peoples. We continue to offer Japan our support.

New Zealand reaffirms its appreciation to the Director General and staff of the International Atomic Energy Agency, particularly the Incident and Emergency Centre and the Department of Nuclear Safety and Security, for their ongoing efforts in cooperation with the Japanese Government to keep Member States informed of relevant developments as the accident at Fukushima has unfolded.

Mr President

For good to come out of this complicated disaster, the international community must understand as fully as possible what has happened so that we can take steps to improve global standards of nuclear safety, preparedness and response. New Zealand thanks the Government of Japan for its readiness to contribute fully to this process. We all know from experience that the lessons to be learned from the Fukushima nuclear accident will be both many and complex. The full scope of these lessons is not yet clear and may not be for many months or even years.

But we are sure of two things. First, our ability to predict nuclear accidents is imperfect, as is our ability to predict multiple natural disasters. Second, the potential transboundary effects of nuclear accidents on human beings, the environment, infrastructure, property and the economy mean that a nuclear accident anywhere is potentially a nuclear accident for the wider region and for the international community as a whole.

This latest accident and the international response to it have highlighted a number of limitations in the existing international nuclear safety framework. In gathering here at a high level this week, the international community recognises that we cannot wait for all the details to become available before we take practical steps to address these limitations. We have a responsibility to the public and to the planet to act responsibly and quickly.

New Zealand welcomes the speedy actions that have been taken by many countries and regional groups to strengthen nuclear safety in the three months since Fukushima. Including urgent national reviews and facility stress tests, these are necessary steps to fulfil the primary safety responsibilities of states which are operating nuclear facilities.

Mr President

New Zealand does not have nuclear power installations. We accept, however, that nuclear power is an option that many states currently rely on or are contemplating. While nuclear power is a present reality, we all have an interest in contributing to international cooperation to ensure that those who have or are preparing for nuclear facilities implement the highest safety standards, including in relation to accident preparedness and response, throughout the nuclear fuel cycle.

New Zealand is confident that in our work this week and in further developing and implementing an action plan of specific measures, we will maximise this unique opportunity to strengthen the international nuclear safety framework. New Zealand attaches high importance to the role of the IAEA in continuing to lead international cooperation in relation to nuclear issues, and to provide the focal point for supporting, improving and increasingly harmonising the nuclear safety standards applied by Member States.

We see this forum as an opportunity to give practical effect to and to build on the annual undertakings that we all make through the nuclear safety resolution at the IAEA General Conference and in other commitments.

Mr President

Without wanting to prejudge the outcome of discussions this week, I would like to highlight a number of areas where New Zealand considers the international nuclear safety framework could be strengthened.

The IAEA nuclear safety standards are uniformly recognised as the global standard in nuclear safety. The standards are to be applied to all nuclear projects undertaken with IAEA resources, and many Member States including New Zealand have adopted the standards directly into their national regulations. But the standards are not yet universal nor are they binding. We would welcome discussion of initiatives to increase the application and legal effect of these standards.

We would support reviewing the mandate and frequency of IAEA peer review and other safety missions to Member States especially those operating nuclear facilities.

The human element in nuclear safety, and in emergency response, is critical. New Zealand recognises the need to ensure that all countries with nuclear facilities, particularly newcomer countries, are committed to a strong national nuclear safety culture including the provision of safety and emergency training to responsible personnel. The IAEA has an important supportive role to play in this.

The availability, timeliness and accuracy of information, including public information and advice, after or during a prolonged nuclear accident are increasingly important, not least given recent developments in communications technology. New Zealand looks forward to further international cooperation to improve the flow of all relevant information during and after a nuclear emergency.

The status of national, regional and international emergency response capabilities will be discussed extensively at this Conference and in the months ahead. New Zealand supports steps to strengthen coordination of relevant resources among Member States, and between the IAEA and other relevant United Nations and international organisations. We look forward to contributing to innovative advances in these areas.

Mr President

The need to provide prompt compensation for damage to people, property and the environment as well as economic loss from the real or perceived effects of a nuclear accident has again been highlighted in the aftermath of Fukushima. New Zealand considers that liability must be among those issues considered as part of a comprehensive international framework for strengthening cooperation on nuclear issues.

Mr President

New Zealand looks forward to contributing constructively to discussions and action planning this week and in the coming months. Differences of opinion about the long-term sustainability of nuclear power should not distract us from the urgent and necessary practical tasks before us.

We will not be able to find all the answers immediately but we must maintain the momentum already generated at a national level and through our collective work in this forum and in this Agency. It is vital that our shared energy and commitment produce real improvements in the international nuclear safety framework to prepare us for whatever lies ahead. New Zealand is ready to play its part and to work with other Member States and the IAEA to seize this opportunity. By doing so we will honour the victims of all nuclear accidents and reduce the future risks inherent in the use of this technology in which so many in the world currently place their confidence.

Thank you.