

Statement the United Nations Office for the Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs
IAEA Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety (20-24 June 2011)
Tuesday 21 June 2011

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Colleagues,

Due to the three emergencies – the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear emergency - that affected Japan in March 2011, human lives have been lost and changed dramatically for a long time to come. Following these tragic events, the Secretary-General, during the Summit on the Safe and Innovative Use of Nuclear Energy in Ukraine on 19 April 2011, announced a five-step proposal to enhance future nuclear safety and security. As you know, a High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Safety and Security is scheduled for 22 September in New York, before which a UN system-wide study on the implications of the Fukushima accident is being undertaken.

During our discussions at this IAEA Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety it will be crucial that we always keep ourselves fixed on the goal we are here to achieve – nothing less than **the safety of the world's people**.

All **natural and man-made disasters have humanitarian impacts** and it is our duty to limit these tragic consequences and to respond to humanitarian needs as effectively as we possibly can.

The nuclear emergency in Japan served as a tragic wake up call for all of us to rethink, as the Secretary-General phrased it, the nexus between natural disasters and nuclear safety. We now have a unique opportunity to re-focus on the systems we have developed over the last 25 years and how well they work. We need to ask ourselves:

- How well do we respond?
- How well are we prepared?

And, having made an honest assessment of the status quo, we have to look towards improvement in the future:

- How can we enhance coherence and knowledge-sharing among national, regional and international disaster management plans?
- How can we better integrate specialized knowledge with broader preparedness planning?
- How can we most effectively ensure that public messages are communicated in a credible and authoritative manner?

At this conference, the focus needs to be on how to prevent nuclear accidents. As a response to the accumulation of global risk, measures need to be taken reduce the risks, safe energy choices should be made and risks for existing nuclear facilities be re-assessed. Extreme weather events and large-scale natural disasters should be better taken into account in decision-making, site selection, building codes and impact assessments.

At the same time, we need to prepare better for a response to an event we would all hope to prevent.

OCHA is the part of the United Nations Secretariat responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. OCHA also ensures that there is a framework within which each actor can contribute to the overall response effort. OCHA operates in the fields of Advocacy, Policy, Coordination and Information Management.

To mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors in order to alleviate human suffering in disasters and emergencies is at the core of OCHA's, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs', mandate, as well as the promotion of preparedness and prevention.

OCHA has a long history of collaboration with IAEA and participates in the Joint Radiation Emergency Management Plan of the International Organizations. OCHA has a range of emergency response tools and services that are applicable also to nuclear emergencies. For the Japan emergency, a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team deployed at the request of the national authorities. Besides coordination, OCHA's services also include information management, resource mobilization, and advocacy.

Based on the collective experience of OCHA, including in its coordinating role for the international cooperation on Chernobyl, the international community is at a juncture today. **We have a unique opportunity to strengthen the linkages between the nuclear response system, as developed under the auspices of the IAEA, and the overall humanitarian response system to natural disasters and other emergencies. We should make best use of this opportunity.**

Last month, a roundtable discussion at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction concluded that there was a need to strengthen safeguards, to better share information and equipment, to strengthen and better interconnect early warning mechanisms, to integrate technological emergencies into multi-hazard risk assessments and contingency planning, and to provide informative messages to affected populations.

We need to **provide timely and accurate information** to potentially affected populations and we need to prepare for such communications in advance together with the private sector, civil society organizations, the media and other stakeholders. We need to make technical data of relevance, and accessible to the general public in a way that adequately reflects potential risks and measures to be taken. Populations around facilities should be better informed about and prepared for the potential risks they face and Early Warning systems need to be strengthened and interconnected. We need to have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities in the information chain and the functioning of the system should be put to the test in international simulations and trainings.

Environmental risks stemming from nuclear power stations, and other industrial facilities, should be **better integrated into contingency planning and preparedness activities**. Hazard identification often only focuses on natural disasters. Secondary risks from industrial facilities are often neglected or disregarded as an integral part of hazard identification. This is a very serious neglect, as these facilities are often capable of causing serious negative impacts, also in trans-boundary context, for many years. It is essential to strengthen the capacities at the regional and national levels to improve integrated contingency planning.

Better preparedness will enable us to respond timely and effectively to humanitarian needs in a context where a nuclear facility may have been affected. This is also an opportune time to collectively review the Joint Radiation Emergency Management Plan for International Organizations and to expand its scope to include other humanitarian organizations.

The international community has a responsibility to collectively address these issues. Not one single organization or country will be able to

do this on its own. We need to review what we have, from conventions to joint plans, from monitoring stations to forecast models, and take an honest look at where we can reduce overlap, fill gaps and improve.

The United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, is the chair of a unique inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The IASC was established in 1992 in implementation of to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of humanitarian assistance and is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian action.

We would therefore like to invite IAEA to **engage the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on the outcomes of this Ministerial Conference and to explore ways to better integrate the nuclear emergency response into the overall humanitarian response and preparedness system.** OCHA is ready and committed to remain a key partner in these efforts.

We wish you fruitful deliberations at this Ministerial Conference and the wisdom and decisiveness needed to make this world a safer place for all of us.