Opening Statement

by

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On the occasion of the

International Conference on Research Reactors:

Safe Management and Effective Utilization

Rabat, Morocco

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Excellency

Dear DG El Mediouri

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning. It's a great pleasure to be here in Rabat, on the occasion of the International Conference on Research Reactors: Safe Management and Effective Utilization. Welcome.

This conference is the premier event in the field of research reactors and is organized every four years by the IAEA with the support of a national government. After 'travelling' the world, from Portugal in 1998, Chile in 2003, to Australia in 2007, this year – it is the African continent's turn. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco for hosting the conference through the National Centre for Nuclear Energy, Sciences and Technology (CNESTEN). Compared to previous events, I understand this will be the biggest such gathering, bringing together more than 200 participants from more than 50 Member States.

The RR conference provides a unique platform for reactor users, operators, managers, regulators, designers and suppliers to come together and share experience, exchange opinion and discuss common challenges, options and strategies. The main objective of course, relates to the exchange of knowledge and information regarding current and new research reactors. Speaking of new RRs, I understand that Africa's newest RR, namely MA-R1 TRIGA Mark II

of Morocco, will be featured during the technical tour on Friday afternoon. I hope you won't miss the opportunity.

Significant issues that the RR community continues to face are primarily related to operation, utilization and safety, ageing, decommissioning, fuel and waste management. There are also more recent challenges, such as initiatives for new RR facilities, securing radioisotope production, human resource and infrastructure capacity building, as well as sustainability of RR programmes, all of which are receiving greater attention. In view of the above, it is timely to convene another in the series of international conferences to discuss the issues and foster cooperation within the worldwide RR community.

For more than 60 years, RRs have been one of the locomotives of nuclear science and technology. To date, approximately 670 RRs have been built, and some 240 of these facilities continue to operate in 55 countries. It goes without saying that RRs must be safely and reliably operated, adequately utilized, refurbished when necessary, provided with adequate proliferation-resistant fuel cycle services and safely decommissioned at the end of life.

In this regard, the IAEA provides assistance to Member States by developing safety standards and disseminating information on good practices for all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle as well as the planning and implementation of decommissioning. Member States look to the IAEA for coordination of the worldwide effort in this area and for help in solving specific problems.

Today RR operating organizations need to overcome challenges such as effective utilization, the on-going management of ageing facilities, pressures for increased vigilance with respect to non-proliferation, and shrinking resources, both financial and human, while fulfilling an expanding role in support of nuclear technology development.

The IAEA coordinates and implements an array of activities that together provide broad support for RRs. As with other aspects of nuclear technology, RR activities within the IAEA are spread among diverse groups in different Departments. To ensure harmonized approaches a cross-cutting coordination group on RRs has been established, with representatives from all IAEA departments actively supporting RR activities.

RR utilization and application related activities are generally led by my department of Nuclear Sciences and Applications. The technological, fuel cycle and operational aspects of RR

management are supported by the Nuclear Energy Department. And the Nuclear Safety and Security Department is assisting Member States in all relevant aspects during all of the stages of the RR lifetime, including design, commissioning, operation, safe utilization, and decommissioning. In addition, the Department of Technical Cooperation coordinates RR activities for the principal benefit of RRs in developing countries with the support of the three technical departments.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In the course of the week, you will hear from colleagues representing all three technical departments who will talk in more detail about the IAEA's activities in the field. They will discuss everything from safety and technical infrastructure needed for countries planning to build their first RR or implementing their first Nuclear Power Project to networking for improved utilization and safety of RRs.

I understand that a dedicated Panel Discussion Session is planned for the closing during which you will have an opportunity to actively participate and provide your input regarding RR related issues. This will also be the chance for you to voice your opinion as related to the Fukushima-Daiichi accident and its consequences for the RR community. I trust that there will be some conclusions and recommendations as a result of your discussions and I look forward to those.

In closing, allow me to once again thank the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco and CNESTEN for hosting this conference. I also wish to congratulate them on the successful start of their first RR operation as a stepping stone towards the National Nuclear Programme.

Last but not least, I would like to express my appreciation to all of you who have worked so hard to organize this meeting.

Thank you.