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UK Statement at the joint IAEA/Japanese Nuclear Safety Conference

Fukushima Prefecture – 17th December 2012

Thank you Mr President.

I would like to start by joining the esteemed speakers before me in remembering the terrible events of following the unprecedented earthquake and tsunami of 11 March 2011. The sheer scale of the devastation and the courage and skill shown by those who are dealing with the aftermath of that day will not be forgotten.

Dai-ichi

The accident at the TEPCO Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant has provided the world with the opportunity to take stock of the assumptions we have all made in the past. The international response to the accident was swift and shows a great commitment to ensuring nuclear safety. In particular the Ministerial Conference in June 2011, the Extra-ordinary meeting of the Convention on Nuclear Safety and this event here today show the world that nuclear safety remains a top priority.

The accident at Chernobyl, while very different to the circumstances that lead to the accident at Fukushima, gave us a stark lesson that nuclear accidents do not respect international borders. The potential trans-boundary effects of a nuclear accident are clearly understood by experts and the public. This knowledge has led to a heightening of public concern about nuclear safety and nuclear power as an energy source.

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Internationally, and nationally, we must not only learn lessons from events at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, but also we need to ensure we are 'seen' to learn the lessons. Discussing the issues and sharing information remains important - however, taking evidence based, and proportionate action remains even more so.

As the UK-Japan Joint Declaration on Civil Nuclear Co-operation made by our two Prime Ministers in April this year said, nuclear energy can play an important role in delivering the safe, secure and low-carbon supplies of energy which both our economies rely on. That Declaration also rightly recognised the importance and urgency of achieving a global low carbon economy and a secure and sustainable energy future. For us in the UK, we have been publicly clear that nuclear energy is a crucial part of this. At the same time, in order for nuclear energy to have the future, we believe it needs to have, we must work together to ensure we take positive action and address public concerns. This is why the UK Government were pleased to support the IAEA Action Plan for nuclear safety.

The Action Plan sets a clear road map for us all to follow in taking the necessary steps to ensure nuclear safety. In particular the importance of undertaking re-assessments of the safety margins at nuclear power plants. These assessments - the so called 'Stress Tests' - are a vital tool to ensure our nuclear power plants are equipped to deal with extraordinary triggering events.

As distinguished delegates will be aware the European Union (EU) have recently completed an EU wide stress test exercise. EU Member States

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are now developing and implementing plans of action to address the issues identified by the stress tests. I am pleased to note that the findings of the EU stress test showed that none of the EU's nuclear power plants needed to be shut down for safety or technical reasons. Of course, this does not mean we can become complacent about the challenges that face us in delivering safe nuclear energy. We must continue to learn from each other. Our nuclear safety regimes, international and national, must be continuously improved.

I am aware that other States have either undertaken or plan to undertake similar tests to those undertaken in the European Union. I hope you will join me in encouraging all those who have not already put such measures in place to do so as a matter of priority.

Of course, the priority must be on prevention of accidents rather than cure. However, it is equally important to ensure that in the event of a major nuclear incident robust response arrangements are in place. In the UK in light of lessons learned from the Fukushima accident we are strengthening our emergency preparedness and response arrangements. This work will look at both our domestic and international arrangements. We are looking at our systems for working with other States as part of the need to ensure, where appropriate, that a co-ordinated approach is taken. In the wider international arena we believe that the IAEA will need to continue to play a pivotal role in ensuring co-ordination. We therefore believe that we should be seeking appropriate opportunities to strengthen their role in this regard.

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We also particularly welcome the proposal in the IAEA Action Plan to ensure regular peer reviews of national nuclear safety arrangements. We are now in the process of agreeing the timing of the next Integrated Regulatory Review Service mission to the UK with the IAEA. If we are to improve safety none of us can afford to shy away from the peer review of our nuclear safety regimes.

I have mentioned the importance of events such as the Extra-ordinary Meeting of the Convention on Nuclear Safety. One of the main outcomes of that event was the establishment of a Working Group on the efficiency and transparency of the Convention on Nuclear Safety. I understand that the first meeting of the Working Group will be held on 4-6 February. I can confirm that the UK will be participating in that event. We look forward to working with the IAEA and others to try to identify measures to strengthen the impact of the Convention.

I, and other speakers, have touched on a number of areas where action is being taken domestically and internationally. There is an impressive list of work being undertaken. We must continue to share the results of this work. Together we can help to strengthen nuclear safety so that nuclear power remains a viable energy option. This Conference is a very welcome step in achieving that aim.

Thank you for listening.