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National Statement
International Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Power in the 21st Century
Deputy Secretary of Energy Daniel Poneman
St. Petersburg, Russia
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Introduction

The United States thanks our hosts -- the Government of Russia and Rosatom Director General Sergei Kiriyenko, -- and our organizer, the IAEA, led by Director General Yukia Amano, in cooperation with the Nuclear Energy Agency of the OECD, for convening this important conference in the beautiful city of St. Petersburg.

U.S. Commitment to Nuclear Energy

Sixty years ago this December 8, President Dwight D. Eisenhower outlined a strategic vision for the United States and for the world in his Atoms for Peace speech before the United Nations General Assembly.

Today, there are over 430 nuclear reactors operating in 31 countries with over sixty more being constructed, and another 150 planned. The world has realized the promise of the atom.

One of the main drivers for the continued development of nuclear energy globally is the growing need for energy coupled with the need to mitigate the effects of climate change and the need to address CO2 emissions.

In 2010, the International Energy Agency projections showed that CO2 emissions will have doubled by 2050 from the 2005 levels, assuming no new policies or measures being taken. Nuclear power can provide electricity without carbon emissions.

In the United States, nuclear power has reliably and economically contributed almost 20 percent of our electrical generation over the past two decades and remains the single largest contributor—more than 60 percent—of non-greenhouse-gas emitting electric power generation in the United States.

Domestically, we are working to reinvigorate our nuclear industry and to develop a new generation of safe, clean nuclear power plants in the United States.

As President Obama noted earlier this week in his speech outlining our Nation's Climate Action Plan, we are building the first commercial nuclear power stations in more than three decades.

At the same time, we are working with our international colleagues, including many here today, to ensure that all countries that comply with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations can access nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in accordance with the highest standards of safety, security, and nonproliferation.

Nuclear Safety and Infrastructure

As occurred after both Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, since March 2011 the nuclear power sector has been learning from the accidents at Fukushima Daiichi. These technical insights will further enhance the safety and security of existing and future reactors.

Every country must be committed to the ongoing effort to improve nuclear safety. In the period after Fukushima, the international community has charted a clear path for such efforts.

International Efforts

The IAEA's Action Plan for improving nuclear safety includes important recommendations.

At their recent Extraordinary Meeting, the Parties to the Nuclear Safety Convention identified a number of action-oriented nuclear safety objectives related to safety standards, international peer review, regulatory independence, and transparency.

The United States has publicly stated our commitment to achieve all these objectives and we renew our call for other countries to make similar public commitments.

Closely related to improving nuclear safety is increasing the protection provided by nuclear liability regimes. Such regimes build public support for and confidence in nuclear power and facilitate the commercial relationships that advance international cooperation.

At the national level, domestic law must fully incorporate international nuclear liability principles, including channeling all liability exclusively to the operator on the basis of strict liability. At the international level, countries that might be affected by a nuclear accident must join together in treaty relations to establish a global nuclear liability regime as called for by the IAEA Action Plan.

In furtherance of this goal, the United States has ratified the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage and urges other countries to do the same. We call on all nations to take the steps necessary to achieve the CSC's entry into force within the next 12 months, including alignment of their domestic laws, and we applaud the commitment Canada has made to ratify.

Whether or not we are nations with a long history of nuclear power generation, there are lessons learned that we need to share and common issues that we need to address.

We established the international framework for nuclear energy cooperation (IFNEC) to ensure that the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes proceeds in a manner that is efficient and meets the highest standards of safety, security and non-proliferation.

This framework provides a forum for countries with different experiences to come together to discuss issues of regulatory infrastructure, human capital development, education and training, financing and back-end challenges.

This effort complements IAEA's important work in the Technical Cooperation area as well as the Peaceful Uses Initiative, and also supports the work of other important multilateral organizations such as the Nuclear Energy Agency.

Nuclear Security

To sustain growth in the commercial nuclear industry, the international community must be confident that the expansion of nuclear facilities will not increase the threats of nuclear weapons proliferation or nuclear terrorism.

The development of a sound national infrastructure, including systems for materials accountancy and control, safety regulation, physical protection, and human capital, is critical to the global success of nuclear power.

The IAEA is taking a leadership role on nuclear security, and Secretary of Energy Moniz will lead U.S. efforts to support the important work of the IAEA in this area.

International Efforts

Indeed, the IAEA is central to this effort. It plays a critical role in international efforts to prevent the diversion, theft and sabotage of nuclear material, thereby complicating the task for both States and terrorists that are trying to acquire nuclear material for weapons.

This year, the United States and Russia will mark a major nonproliferation milestone with the completion of HEU downblending and the final delivery of downblended LEU under the HEU Purchase Agreement. Through this historic partnership, 500 metric tons of weapons-origin HEU, enough material for 20,000 nuclear weapons, will have been downblended in Russia and converted into nuclear fuel, providing half the fuel for U.S. commercial power reactors during the 20 year course of this agreement.

So even as we look forward to a world without nuclear weapons, we can embrace the far-reaching benefits that nuclear technology has brought into our lives, from keeping food safe, to preventing disease, to providing high tech medicines that can diagnose, treat and find new cures for cancer, to providing a stable energy source for future generations that does not contribute to carbon pollution.

Conclusion

The U.S. looks forward to continuing to work with the international community and industry on moving toward a low-carbon future, with nuclear power playing an important role in a manner that is safe, secure, and consistent with the nonproliferation goals that we all share.

Thank you.