

2011 IAEA General Conference
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
Secretary Steven Chu
Monday, September 19, 2011

Thank you, Ambassador Feruta. Congratulations on your election as President of this Conference. I also want to thank Director General Amano for his outstanding leadership.

I am honored to represent the United States today, and I want to share a message from President Barack Obama:

“On behalf of the United States, please accept my best wishes for a successful International Atomic Energy Agency General Conference. This year’s meeting takes place against the backdrop of the severe earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in March and the devastating accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station that followed. Along with the international community, the United States will continue to stand by and support our Japanese friends as they recover from this crisis.

“The tragic events at Fukushima make clear that nuclear energy, which holds great promise for global development and as a carbon-free source of power, also brings significant challenges to our collective safety and security. Going forward, we must rededicate ourselves to the principle that when pursuing nuclear energy, safety and security must be our highest priority. The United States supports the efforts of Director General Amano to enhance nuclear safety worldwide and to elevate the vital role of the IAEA on this front. We also support strengthening the IAEA’s role in increasing nuclear security around the world.

“We must aim for a future in which peaceful nuclear energy is not only safe, but also accessible by all nations that abide by their obligations. We must safeguard against any possible diversion or misuse of nuclear energy, whether by nations or terrorists, and ensure nations that violate their obligations face consequences. For those that play by the rules, we are committed to building new frameworks for cooperation that accelerate nuclear energy assistance and lower the risks of proliferation. The approval of an IAEA nuclear fuel bank, to which the United States has committed \$50 million, and the launch of the IAEA Peaceful Uses Initiative, to which the United States has committed another \$50 million, will strengthen the foundation of the international nonproliferation regime.

“Next year in Seoul, the Republic of Korea will host the Nuclear Security Summit, building on the summit I convened last year to secure the world’s vulnerable nuclear materials. Sharpening the focus on nuclear security is essential to prevent nuclear terrorism. As a further step, we must ensure a robust dialogue among safety and security experts and work to build on the synergies between the two.

“Through these efforts, and many others that involve the IAEA and its member states, we will succeed in shaping a future where nuclear energy is both safe and secure. Thank you and best wishes for a successful meeting.”

As President Obama expressed, it's critical that we address the challenge of the atom: how to harness its power for peaceful and productive uses while guarding against the most destructive weapons the world has known.

No nation can tackle this challenge alone. We must face it together – and the IAEA is central to this effort.

Today, I want to discuss four priorities of President Obama's nuclear agenda: the safe and peaceful use of nuclear energy, strengthening the nuclear nonproliferation regime, nuclear disarmament and nuclear security.

PEACEFUL USES OF NUCLEAR ENERGY

Nuclear power will continue to be an important part of our energy mix, both in the United States and around the world. Its role grows more valuable as we confront a changing climate, increasing energy demand, and a struggling global economy.

At the same time, the Fukushima disaster reminds us that nuclear safety and security require continued vigilance.

All nations have a responsibility to learn from Japan's experience. In the United States, a Nuclear Regulatory Commission Task Force has completed an initial 90-day review of the agency's regulatory oversight and safety standards, given insights from Fukushima, and provided a set of recommendations to enhance reactor safety. The Task Force recommendations are now under consideration by the full Commission.

In June, the IAEA and other member states pledged to re-examine nuclear safety standards, emergency preparedness plans, and incident response capabilities. The United States strongly supports these efforts, and believes the IAEA must play a critical role. The United States also supports the implementation of the IAEA Action Plan on nuclear safety to address lessons learned from Fukushima. We must, however, maintain the central role of national regulators and plant operators in achieving safety objectives.

The events at Fukushima emphasize the need for a global nuclear liability regime to ensure that accident victims are compensated and to support a stable legal environment for nuclear energy's expansion. In short, the time has come to adopt the Convention on Supplementary Compensation.

Additionally, member states should work to ratify and implement relevant international conventions on safety and emergency response, such as the Conventions on Nuclear Safety and on Assistance and Early Notification.

We also encourage discussion through the International Framework for Nuclear Energy Cooperation on issues including infrastructure development, financing, and nuclear fuel services.

The United States supports expanded and reliable access to fuel supplies, working through the commercial marketplace and public-private partnerships, for peaceful nuclear programs. The IAEA Low Enriched Uranium Fuel Bank, the UK mechanism for assured supply, and the Russian fuel reserve at Angarsk provide important fuel supply assurances.

The United States recently announced the availability of a reserve stockpile of low-enriched uranium for countries pursuing peaceful civilian nuclear programs. The American Assured Fuel Supply, which is now available, comes from down-blending 17.4 metric tons of surplus highly enriched uranium from the U.S. weapons stockpile. This initiative will help promote nuclear energy in a way that is consistent with our nonproliferation and disarmament commitments.

These measures form part of the new international framework that President Obama called for in Prague. As a next step, we will encourage commercial nuclear companies to join together, under appropriate laws and regulations, to provide secure, reliable access to both front and back-end fuel services to any country with nuclear reactors. This type of fuel service arrangement would dramatically reduce the need for countries to develop indigenous enrichment and reprocessing technologies.

We are also working with many of you to ensure that member states can access the peaceful benefits of the atom. Last year, the United States pledged \$50 million to the IAEA Peaceful Uses Initiative. With Japan as a partner, we continue to seek contributions to this initiative, and we appreciate those countries that have already stepped forward.

STRENGTHENING NONPROLIFERATION AND INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS

Promoting civil nuclear energy must go hand in hand with strengthening the nuclear nonproliferation regime by making international safeguards more efficient and more effective. But we cannot expect the IAEA to succeed in that mission without adequate resources and the support of its members.

That is why the United States is making a voluntary contribution of more than \$85 million above our 2011 budget contribution to enhance technical cooperation, international safeguards, nuclear safety, nuclear security, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

That is why our Next Generation Safeguards Initiative and the U.S. Support Program are working to modernize IAEA safeguards and to encourage the transition to a robust, information driven system.

And that is why we encourage all states to bring into force and fully implement comprehensive safeguards agreements along with an Additional Protocol. Only in this way will the IAEA have the authority needed to meet its verification responsibilities. We congratulate the eight states that have brought into force an Additional Protocol since last year's General Conference.

To maintain the credibility and effectiveness of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, all states must honor their IAEA safeguards obligations.

Iran has continued to engage in a longstanding pattern of denial, deceit, and evasion, in violation of its nonproliferation obligations. Time and time again, Iran has refused to satisfy legitimate concerns about the nature of its nuclear program – selectively rejecting IAEA requests for access to, and information about, its nuclear facilities.

A recent manifestation of Iran's provocative behavior was its decision to begin installing centrifuges at an underground facility near Qom. Iran initiated construction of this facility in secret, notifying the Agency only because it was caught two years ago. Iran says it intends to use the facility to increase uranium enrichment to near 20 percent, claiming this is needed to fuel its existing research reactor or other reactors for which ground has yet to be broken. Expanding, and moving underground, its enrichment to this level marks a significant provocation and brings Iran still closer to having the capability to produce weapons grade uranium. Pursuing this course raises serious questions over Iran's peaceful intent and its readiness to build confidence.

Iran's government has a choice: it can comply with its obligations and restore international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear activities or it can face deepening isolation and international censure.

We applaud the IAEA Board of Governors for reporting Syria to the UN Security Council for safeguards violations. Syria must now cooperate fully with the IAEA. Syria should also sign and promptly bring into force an Additional Protocol to its safeguards agreement.

On North Korea, the path is open to the resumption of talks, improved relations with the United States, and greater regional stability if North Korea demonstrates through actions that it is committed to being a constructive partner. North Korea must take substantive and irreversible steps toward denuclearization, honor its international obligations, and return to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and to IAEA safeguards.

The IAEA Board of Governors has taken strong action by reporting noncompliance by these three states to the UN Security Council. Now, the international community must send a strong message that violations of nuclear nonproliferation obligations will not be tolerated. Failure to address these issues would undermine global and regional stability and the global nonproliferation regime itself.

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

A key part of the nonproliferation regime is our shared commitment to meeting our NPT Article VI commitments. Since we last met, the United States has taken bold steps toward fulfilling our nuclear disarmament obligations.

In February, the New START Treaty between the United States and Russia entered into force. Our two nations will reduce the number of deployed warheads to the lowest level since

the 1950s – an approximate reduction of 85 percent from the dark days of the Cold War. The United States is committed to continuing a step-by-step process to reduce the overall number of nuclear weapons, including the pursuit of a future agreement with Russia for broad reductions in all nuclear weapons – strategic, non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed.

The U.S. and Russia also brought into force a landmark agreement to each dispose of at least 34 metric tons of surplus weapons-grade plutonium. The IAEA has a significant and unique role to play in helping to implement the agreement's verification regime, and we are working closely with the Agency to define and develop that role.

Additionally, the NPT Nuclear Weapon States continue to discuss nuclear disarmament, nonproliferation, transparency, and verification.

We continue to make progress toward our shared commitment to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty into force by strengthening its verification regime. The United States is committed to ratifying the CTBT.

The United States is aggressively pursuing a disarmament agenda. We call on others to faithfully do the same. We can make a start by launching long delayed negotiations on a fissile material cutoff treaty. This treaty is crucial to achieving our shared disarmament and nonproliferation objectives.

NUCLEAR SECURITY/ PREVENTING NUCLEAR TERRORISM

Finally, we must continue our work together to prevent nuclear terrorism – one of the most immediate and extreme threats to global security.

We are grateful to the many nations who participated in the historic 2010 Nuclear Security Summit, and who are living up to those commitments. Tremendous progress has been made. For example:

- Many states have committed to developing nuclear security “Centers of Excellence” to provide training and capacity building.
- Since the summit, the United States has removed approximately 400 kilograms of highly enriched uranium and plutonium – enough material to make over 15 nuclear weapons – from several countries.
- We’ve also down-blended 700 kilograms of highly enriched uranium from civil nuclear programs to low enriched uranium, making it unsuitable for use in nuclear weapons.
- In cooperation with our partners, we have deployed radiation detection systems to 19 transit sites worldwide, continue to improve security at nuclear facilities, and are

working to increase information sharing among police and security services to counter nuclear smuggling.

- In addition, the IAEA has revised and strengthened its Nuclear Security Guidance document on “The Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and Nuclear Facilities.” The United States welcomes this action and looks forward to working with the IAEA and member states to implement the recommendations.

We look forward to building on this collective progress at the follow-up summit next year in the Republic of Korea.

CONCLUSION

Nuclear energy lies at the intersection of two of our most pressing issues: the energy and climate challenge and the threat of nuclear proliferation and terrorism. We cannot defer action on either of these tough problems.

That is why two and a half years ago, the President laid out an ambitious agenda to secure vulnerable nuclear material around the world and to move toward a world without nuclear weapons while promoting peaceful nuclear power.

Albert Einstein once said, “Through the release of atomic energy, our generation has brought into the world the most revolutionary force since prehistoric man's discovery of fire.”

Working together, we can help ensure that this revolutionary force is used for peace and prosperity, not death and destruction. And we can build a brighter and more secure future for ourselves and for future generations. Thank you.

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