

Acceptance Speech

At the 58th Session of the General Conference of the IAEA
22 – 26 September 2014 - Vienna

Director General Yukiya Amano,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
My dear colleagues,

It is a great honour for my country, Sri Lanka, to be conferred with the Office of President of the General Conference today. I accept this onerous task in all humility and sincerity. I appreciate the confidence that you have reposed in me to steer this process through, in the next few days. Let me also thank my Group, Middle East & South Asia, for considering me to be entrusted with this responsibility.

I bring greetings to all of you from the President of Sri Lanka, H.E. Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we stand on solid ground, we sometimes celebrate only our 'standing'. We tend to forget the ground under our feet. My grateful thanks therefore go to all those who have worked hard

to make this ground solid, at the Agency. Countless number of people, women and men, have contributed to achieving this, over decades of the Agency's existence.

I thank Ambassador Xolisa Mfundiso Mabhongo who presided over the 57th General Conference for his energetic stewardship.

I truly appreciate the exemplary leadership of Director General Amano. I commend the excellent services of his very dedicated team at the Agency. A special compliment goes to PMO Secretariat!

A part of the ground I stand on today was no doubt cemented by all of them as well as several others. Among them remain those who contributed effectively and dedicatedly to the success of key mechanisms and processes within the Agency. Ambassador Thiep Nguyen of Vietnam, Chair of the Governing Board, comes to my mind in this context.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over years of my engagement in different multilateral settings, I have come to appreciate invariably, one important thing. That

is the strand that runs through all the work we do as delegates, diplomats and negotiators. That strand, I would say, is the commitment to embracing all other strands in the same fabric. Together, they present a unified strength. The force of such unity helps to withstand, or address effectively, pressing challenges. This is so even as most challenges would initially appear to be rather intractable.

What has made such an achievement possible? Or, what makes it possible even today when things around us may often seem gloomy. Let us think aloud, together.

I believe the ingredients are not too far to seek. So are examples which are aplenty.

In my limited worldview, I would identify them as five keys. Some of you may want to differ, may not even agree. But, differing is democratic - again a value which would only bring me back to the same five keys which I am going to enumerate:

I will put them in the following way: dialogue (i), which leads to consensus building (ii), in the larger interest of the organisation

(iii) with an outcome-orientation (iv), with a sense of timing, or within a timeframe (v).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are well aware, dialogue is the best way to understand one another. Above all, it helps signify an intention to address what keeps us apart in the first place. Constructive dialogue takes us together to the next phase of the resolution spectrum.

Consensus is the best form of agreement to carry all, along to a desired outcome. It is a treasured goal, which we need to continue to pursue and aspire to reach. Practical realities often predominate. They have demonstrated – sometimes very cruelly - that not everything is achieved in the best form that one desires. This should not despair us, however. We should take the trouble – or, shall I say the courage- to walk that 'extra mile' to make it. If we seek greater legitimacy to both the process that we undertake as well as its end product – the outcome, unanimity or consensus remains the only way out.

Let me take this opportunity to assure you that search for consensus or common ground, would remain the mainstay of my approach. I have full confidence that the Chair of the Committee of the Whole, a suave and seasoned Ambassador, would do all at his disposal to achieve that. The Committee of the Whole moving along its assigned agenda in a timely, efficient and cooperative manner is thus imperative. I would urge delegations - my dear colleagues- to take a broad based approach to dealing with issues that may arise. With some flexibility, we can build bridges across all apparent divides. I believe in the ability and willingness of the delegations and the Committee of the Whole to desire to achieve such an outcome.

Such a spirit and approach would no doubt help make our efforts outcome-oriented. Orienting our work towards results, I would say, is in the larger interest of both the Agency and all our countries. Our interests need to coalesce into underpinning and bolstering up the Agency in the multi-faceted useful work it does.

My dear colleagues,

I said earlier that examples are aplenty and are not too far to seek. I would like to highlight just one – the most recent one. That is the Working Group on Financing the Agency's Activities, Co-Chaired by Ambassador Marion Paradas of France and Ambassador Michael Oyugi of Kenya. All delegates, supported by their respective groups- G 77 or EU- or, working in their own national capacities, ensured that these five keys were put to good use. I consider it an epitome of best practice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world today is faced with a myriad of challenges. Their implications will be far reaching, if we fail to grasp them, address them and endeavour to find solutions to them in a timely manner. Again one need not over-emphasize the role of consensus building, which accompanies the principle of use of peaceful means. We need to ensure that today does not threaten 'our' tomorrow. We truly mean- and seek to achieve- an Agenda for Development, post-2015, not an agenda for destruction.

Let me recall in this regard that the International Day for Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons falls on 26th September 2014.

It will be observed on sidelines of the General Conference on 24th September.

Is IAEA relevant in this new paradigm? I think it is, very much so.

On the one hand, there is an over-riding obligation of ensuring non-diversion of nuclear material, nuclear technology, for non-peaceful purposes. This responsibility requires not just mutual trust but also the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions and processes. On the other, there is also the more important obligation to ensure that nuclear energy and nuclear technology contributes to improving the lives of people. IAEA's continuing contribution in this field is vital. Technical assistance including for promoting non-power applications plays a crucial role in advancing this objective.

In a multitude of areas including nuclear safety, security and safeguards, nuclear applications for promotion of health, agriculture, the environment etc., the Agency has done commendable work. It has ensured, and continue to ensure, the peaceful use of nuclear energy. It does so while facilitating verification of nuclear safeguards.

All this should continue in the interest of all our countries and the Agency. This is one- but important- way the Agency contributes to achieving a world secure for all – ensuring non-diversion, and promoting peaceful use, of nuclear energy and nuclear technology. The time ahead until September 2015 is a critical period to consolidate the gains made and to create synergies for effectively pursuing a new Development Agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the next few days we would be deliberating on an agenda aimed to address various issues, in their different dimensions. We need to make sure what we achieve is only substantively outcome-oriented. This brings me to the last of the five keys that I mentioned: a sense of timing, or timeframe. Time is precious. Time lost never comes back. Let us therefore not exceed the time allotted, when making General Debate statements and working on other proposals and initiatives.

Finally, if peaceful use is important for advancing development, is the use of peace for advancing development not important equally, if not more? What has it to do with IAEA? With peace

taking hold in Sri Lanka, my country has undertaken jointly with IAEA, a number of activities intended to benefit people. In fact, the number of activities, of both regional and sub-regional nature, conducted by the Agency in Sri Lanka in the past 3 years, exceeds the number of IAEA activities that took place there in a decade or so. That is a lesson learnt, useful for both the Agency and other countries.

As I conclude, let me reiterate my fervent belief: We can – and we will make the General Conference a success. Let us do so through constructive cooperation, consensus building and outcome orientation. Thank you.