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58th Session of the IAEA General Conference

Address by

Mr Walter Steinmann
Secretary of State and Governor for Switzerland

Vienna, 23 September 2014

Mr President,

The Swiss delegation extends its warmest congratulations to you on your election to the Presidency of the 58th Session of the IAEA General Conference, and wishes to assure you of its full support in the performance of your office.

My delegation is especially pleased to welcome the Republic of Vanuatu, the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, the Union of the Comoros and the Republic of Djibouti as new member states of the IAEA.

Mr President,

The Chernobyl and Fukushima accidents posed a major challenge for the global nuclear community.

If the occurrence of a severe accident every 25 years or so punctuates our efforts aimed at implementing nuclear technologies, the question arises as to how we can assure our fellow citizens that we are doing so for the well-being and continued development of mankind, as cited in the statutes of the IAEA.

The safety authorities of the States Parties to the **Convention on Nuclear Safety** understand that there is a need for action.

Based on a recommendation included in the IAEA Action Plan on Nuclear Safety, Switzerland proposed an amendment with a view to enhancing the safety not only of existing reactors, but also of new ones.

The States Parties to the Convention on Nuclear Safety decided to debate this proposal within the scope of a diplomatic conference to be held in Vienna in February 2015.

Mr President, our respective governments have a duty to act, and three years after the Fukushima accident we have a unique opportunity to restore and strengthen the confidence of our fellow citizens in the safety of our nuclear facilities and in the multilateral instruments that have been created for that purpose.

Switzerland therefore calls on all States Parties to the Convention on Nuclear Safety to adopt a constructive approach with a view to creating the necessary conditions for assuring the success of the forthcoming diplomatic conference. Switzerland is well

aware of its responsibility and will be making a substantial financial contribution in order to facilitate the organisation of the conference.

My delegation is optimistic regarding the outcome of the diplomatic conference.

The safety authorities who attended the meeting of the Western European Nuclear Regulators Association decided to adopt the practices that correspond to the amendment proposal put forward by Switzerland. The incorporation of this amendment into the Convention on Nuclear Safety would mean that it will be possible to avoid the creation of two levels of safety in the future.

We are aware that, in its present form, the wording will not make it possible to achieve this objective in an optimal manner. It did not meet with consensus at the 6th Review Conference of the Convention on Nuclear Safety. However, the decision to hold a diplomatic conference next year indicates that the signatory parties feel that the text deserves to be debated in greater depth with a view to finding the necessary consensus.

Switzerland is prepared to continue to participate in the informal process that is currently being led by the ambassador of Argentina, and calls on all States Parties to do likewise.

Mr President,

In the coming months, a variety of important events will be taking place for the Agency, for the nuclear non-proliferation regime and for the responsible civilian use of nuclear energy.

In addition to the diplomatic conference for the Convention on Nuclear Safety, these include in particular the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference to be held in May 2015, which will focus on the implementation of the recommendations resulting from the previous conference held in 2010. Switzerland is already preparing to actively participate in this conference.

Mr President,

The responsible use of nuclear energy has to take account of the risk of misappropriation of nuclear and radiological material, as we were reminded by the activities of the Hague Summit. My delegation wishes to express its thanks to the

Netherlands for the warm welcome it extended to the participants, and for its faultless organisation of this conference on nuclear safety.

Although nuclear safety is the sole responsibility of each State, we call on those States that have not yet done so to ratify and implement the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, together with its Amendment, and to apply the measures cited in the IAEA Code of Conduct on the Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources.

In the international context, the IAEA is the sole institution recognised by the international community to play a leading role in the area of nuclear safety. It is in the position to provide advice and define good practices in this area in order to provide assistance to those States that request it.

In order to ensure that the objective of nuclear safety is deemed credible, it is essential to reinforce the safety of all nuclear and radiological materials, i.e. civilian as well as military materials. In view of the enormous destructive capacities they possess, the latter represent the greater risk, of course.

Ahead of the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference and with a view to the 4th Nuclear Security Summit and the IAEA Conference on Nuclear Security scheduled to take place in 2016, it is important to send a clear signal to strengthen all areas of nuclear security.

I would now like to focus on the auditing activities of the Agency.

Mr President, **the safeguards** of the IAEA are essential for the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and we all have to ensure their efficiency and effectiveness.

My delegation greatly appreciates both the work carried out by the Secretariat in the course of the past two years concerning the approach at the State level, as well as the quality of the dialogue it has initiated. These activities culminated in the publication of a consistent and impressive supplementary document.

Switzerland wishes to particularly underscore the fact that improvements have to take place to the benefit not only of the Agency, but also of the State in question, in terms of both cost and reduction of efforts.

Should these improvements prove to be of little significance, it would make sense to re-launch the debate. On the one hand because the resolution regarding the safeguards, which is regularly adopted at the General Conference and which calls for their efficient and effective implementation, and on the other hand because some of the recommendations included in the final document of the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, would not have been complied with. In this regard we await the periodical reports of the Secretariat on the implementation of the approach at the State level.

Switzerland wants to pursue its commitment towards the optimisation of a system of safeguards because this involves sending a clear signal ahead of the 2015 NPT Review Conference and establishing a new relationship of trust between the States Parties.

My delegation also welcomes the cooperation that has come into being between the IAEA and the Islamic Republic of Iran since January 2014. At a time when this dossier is entering a decisive phase, we encourage both partners to pursue and strengthen this cooperation with the aim of finding a diplomatic solution that is acceptable to all parties.

Mr President,

In the document entitled “Safeguards Implementation Report in 2013” or SIR 2013, Switzerland finds itself classified in the group of countries for which “assessments concerning the absence of materials and non-declared activities are ongoing.” However, the assessments by the IAEA concerning Switzerland were concluded in 2011 and there are no more pending issues.

We therefore ask the Secretariat to address this anomaly in its next report.

In November 2013, the inspectors of our national system of accounting for and controlling nuclear material, accompanied by persons responsible for nuclear material at various facilities, attended a two-day course for which they expressed their gratitude. I wish to thank the Agency for having offered us this opportunity.

Mr President,

My delegation would like to thank the co-presidents of the “Financing of the Activities of the IAEA” workgroup entrusted with the mandate of putting forward proposals for securing the acceptable financing of the Technical Cooperation fund. This was by no means an easy task, and the helpful and transparent discussions demonstrated that the matter has not been exhausted.

I would like to take this opportunity to state that my delegation is among those that regard Article 2 of the statutes to be the fundamental reason for the adherence of the vast majority of States to the IAEA, and that in view of this the Technical Cooperation fund should be integrated into the ordinary budget.

Before I conclude, Mr President, I would like to pass on some information concerning the use of nuclear energy in Switzerland.

In the wake of the accident in Fukushima, on 25 May 2011 the Federal Council and Parliament announced that Switzerland is to gradually withdraw from the use of nuclear energy for the purpose of producing electricity. In accordance with this decision, the five existing nuclear power plants are to be decommissioned when they reach the end of their service life, and will not be replaced.

With this objective in mind, our government subsequently drafted a new energy strategy called Energy Strategy 2050, which it submitted to Parliament for deliberation.

Energy Strategy 2050 not only incorporates energy-related measures such as the non-replacement of decommissioned nuclear power plants, a reduction of electricity consumption, the increased use of renewable energy and a reduction of energy consumption in the mobility sector, but also calls for a strategic reorientation of energy and climate policy in the medium term. In its proposed new strategy, the Federal Council is prioritising the systematic integration of existing efficiency potentials, followed by the adequate utilisation of the existing potentials of hydropower and renewable energy sources. Then at a later stage it intends to substitute the existing efficiency promotion system with an incentives mechanism.

Together with the submission of its proposed new strategy to Parliament, which includes the need for a total revision of the Swiss Federal Energy Act, our government included an initial package of measures. The matter is currently in the hands of Parliament, and the debate is expected to be concluded in 2015. After the new legislation has been adopted, it is likely that it will have to be voted on in an optional referendum. The new legislation will probably enter into force in the course of 2016.

Mr President, it is in this context that, in October 2013, *Forces Motrices Bernoises* (Bernese Electricity Works) announced its decision to discontinue the operation of Mühleberg nuclear power plant in 2019. As the reasons for this decision the management cited economic and political aspects, together with the high level of investment that would be required for the safe operation of the facility over the long term.

Mr President, I would now like to say a few words about the situation regarding the management of radioactive waste.

In accordance with the Swiss Federal Nuclear Energy Act, the operators of nuclear installations are required to finance the costs of storage of their radioactive waste. Two independent funds were created for the purposes of securing the costs of decommissioning nuclear installations on the one hand, and the storage of radioactive waste on the other.

However, a recent study revealed that the financing requirements of these two funds will be higher than originally anticipated. The main reasons for this are that the payments into the funds are lower than budgeted and the technical costs will be higher than expected. In view of this, our government decided to increase the financial contributions by 30 percent and lower the reference rates for return on equity.

In the area of waste management, the search for suitable sites for housing a deep geological repository has been carried out in accordance with a three-phase programme that was initiated in 2008. At the end of phase 1 in 2011, six sites for

housing a deep geological repository were selected and declared suitable for the storage of nuclear waste. These are currently undergoing more detailed examination in order to draw comparisons in terms of technical safety.

Those regions deemed suitable for housing a deep geological repository have the option of contributing to the process. Regional conferences have commented on surface installations, and are also discussing the strategy of regional development and the analysis of socioeconomic impacts.

The aim is that, by 2027, the selection process should culminate in the identification of one site that is suitable for the storage of low-level and intermediate-level radioactive waste, and another for high-level radioactive waste. The option of a single site for both categories also remains on the table.

Mr President, with effect from next Monday, Switzerland will have the honour of once again serving on the Board of Governors. I wish to assure you in my capacity as Governor for Switzerland that our delegation will actively participate in the efforts of the Board of Governors and lend its support to joint initiatives that set out to help the Agency meet the objectives of its statutes.

To conclude, Mr President, on behalf of my delegation I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the employees of the Secretariat and to the Director General, Mr Amana, for the high quality of work that has been carried out throughout the past year.

Mr President, thank you very much for your attention.