

STATEMENT BY ESTONIA

International Conference on Nuclear Security: Shaping the Future (ICONS 2024)

Ms Katrin Saarsalu-Layachi, Special Envoy for Climate and Energy Policy

Vienna, 21 May 2024

Mr/Mrs. Chairman, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

[Estonia fully aligns itself with the EU statement.]. I would like to make some additional remarks to highlight key points for Estonia. At the outset, let me commend Director General Rafael Grossi and the Co-Chairs Australia and Kazakhstan for convening this important and far-reaching conference. Strengthening nuclear security is crucial for ensuring the protection of people and the environment. We reaffirm that individual States bear the primary responsibility for nuclear security; however, international cooperation and coordination in this domain remain essential.

Estonia recognizes the Agency's central role in reinforcing the global nuclear security framework. We welcome the Agency's work in implementing the Nuclear Security Plan for 2022-2025 to enhance global nuclear security measures. Estonia contributes on a voluntary basis to the Nuclear Security Fund and continues to adhere to the Code of Conduct on the Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources and its supplements.

Mr/Mrs. Chairman,

The deteriorating security environment is one of the main global challenges for both multilateral action and regional stability. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Estonia supports the universal and effective implementation of the NPT and underlines the Agency's safeguards system in reducing nuclear threats. We emphasize the importance of the implementation of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and its Amendment and highlight the significance of UN Security Council Resolution 1540, the first international instrument to comprehensively prevent non-state actors from obtaining access to weapons of mass destruction.

Mr/Mrs. Chairman,

Estonia supports the use and development of innovative nuclear technologies to help Member States ensure energy security and to utilize nuclear science and technologies for socio-economic, medical, health, and environmental benefits. It is crucial to apply the highest levels of safety and security standards. In the process of digitalization, we must not underestimate the need to improve the cybersecurity of nuclear facilities and national databases.

Estonia does not have a nuclear program, but on our path to achieving climate neutrality and ensuring dispatchable electricity generation alongside renewables, we are considering the potential deployment of Small Modular Reactors beyond 2030 to meet our 2050 climate targets. We thank the Agency for its support and advice during the preparations by the nuclear energy working group. The Integrated Nuclear Infrastructure Review Mission in October 2023, conducted by the Agency's experts, found that Estonia was well on its way to advancing its nuclear energy program, having thoroughly assessed the requirements for nuclear energy infrastructure in Estonia.

Mr/Mrs. Chairman, Dear colleagues,

The Republic of Estonia expresses continued concern about incidents endangering nuclear safety worldwide. We refer specifically to the increased attacks near the Zaporizhka Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine, which has been occupied by the Russian Federation for more than two years, rendering it unable to produce electricity and subjecting it to worsening nuclear safety and security conditions. Russian troops have also targeted the Khmelnytsky nuclear power plant site.

We commend Director General Grossi for continuously calling for an end to such attacks, which increase the risk of a major nuclear incident. It is crucial that the Agency's 5 Principles and 7 indispensable pillars for ensuring nuclear safety and security in an armed conflict are respected. We are thankful for the IAEA experts stationed at the Zaporizhka plant and other nuclear plants in Ukraine for their courageous work and assistance to Ukraine, as well as for sharing with the world the breaches of nuclear security currently occurring.

Estonia strongly supports the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. Therefore, Estonia calls for the immediate return of the Zaporizhka plant to Ukraine's control and urges Russia to immediately and completely withdraw its forces from the Zaporizhka plant. We will continue to call for this and support Ukraine for as long as necessary.

Mr/Mrs. Chairman,

In conclusion, Estonia will continue to support the Agency's efforts in nuclear security and recognizes the Agency's central role in strengthening the international nuclear security framework.

Thank you for your attention, and I wish everyone a successful conference.