

IAEA 68th General Conference

National statement BELGIUM

Vienna, 16 September 2024

Mister Chair,

First of all, allow me to congratulate you on your election as Chair of this 68th General Conference and to assure you of Belgium's full support. Belgium aligns itself with the statement of the European Union available online and I would like to add some remarks in a national capacity.

We are gathered here to make multilateralism work and to support the work of the IAEA, despite the numerous issues that undermine the multilateral order. Nuclear security, safety and safeguards are inextricably linked to the international security context, which is reflected in the many challenges the Agency faces in fulfilling its tasks.

Due to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, Ukraine's and the world's nuclear safety and security are under threat. The unlawful occupation of the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant (ZNNP), as well as Russia's continued attacks on Ukraine's critical energy infrastructure pose the real risk of a serious nuclear incident. We welcome the personal involvement of DG Grossi and the continuous presence of IAEA personnel at Zaporizhzhya and at the other nuclear facilities of Ukraine, activities for which Belgium donated 3 million euros to the IAEA. However, there is only one rightful resolution to the situation, namely Russia's immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Ukraine's territory.

On another front, Iran continuously fails to provide the necessary information and cooperation with the IAEA in order to clarify and resolve outstanding issues with regards to its obligations under its safeguards agreement with the IAEA, as imposed by article III of the NPT.

Moreover, Iran has moved away from the JCPoA, although this voluntary agreement was designed to foster confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme.

Iran can still correct its course, by returning to conformity with its safeguards agreement and with the JCPoA, by cooperating with the IAEA and by ratifying the Additional Protocol, which will give the IAEA the tools to permanently monitor Iran's nuclear programme in a comprehensive manner.

The DPRK also continues to taunt the international community. Its expansionist nuclear and ballistic programme is coupled with disquieting changes at the doctrinal level. Oversight of restrictive measures should be strengthened, particularly by the members of the UN Security Council, who agreed to these measures in the first place.

We call on all members of the international community to strongly uphold the principles that guide the work of the IAEA, so as to find solutions to the numerous challenges we face.

Mister Chair,

Every Member State has a duty to support the Agency and to join forces in various domains of cooperation to achieve sustainable development for all.

In March of this year, Belgium was honoured to organize together with the IAEA the first ever Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels. In the shadow of the Atomium, world leaders acknowledged that nuclear energy forms a key component of our global strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance energy resilience. The work of the IAEA together with its member states is indispensable to make sure that nuclear energy is developed and used in a long-term, sustainable manner with proper regard for safety, security, nuclear waste management and non-proliferation. As we approach COP29, the commitment made by world leaders in Brussels is one of the pieces of the puzzle to transition away from fossil fuels.

The IAEA plays a crucial role in ensuring that all State Parties can enjoy the benefits of the atom through assistance and technology transfer. Belgium's voluntary assessed contribution to the Technical Cooperation Fund and the extrabudgetary contributions to the Agency continue to support the many successful initiatives in the field of nuclear medicine,

food security, nuclear safety, capacity building, training, women empowerment, and safeguards. The Ministerial Conference in November will be an excellent opportunity to showcase and build upon technical cooperation projects and a broad range of nuclear applications for sustainable development.

Our country remains at the forefront of nuclear science, as illustrated by our research into lead-bismuth cooled accelerator driven fast reactor systems and lead-cooled SMRs, which could become an important link in sustainable energy supply. We are steadily advancing with these technologies, as witnessed by the recent groundbreaking ceremony for the accelerator building of the MYRRHA reactor complex. In parallel, SCK CEN is setting up a consortium for the development of lead-cooled SMR's with as a first step a demonstrator reactor at its site. I invite you all to discover this know-how at the Belgian booth in the Rotunda. Our side event on Tuesday at 3 PM will furthermore demonstrate the importance of a European partnership combining research expertise with industrial know-how.

Let's turn now to another major field of our expertise: nuclear medicine. In June, we launched a Belgian action plan for innovative cancer treatment, aimed at radioligand therapy (RLT), also known as Targeted Radionuclide Therapy. This pioneering therapy could become a major new pillar in the fight against cancer. Our action plan aims to perpetuate Belgium's pioneering role in radioligand therapy and future-proof our healthcare system.

Moreover, as one of the leading producers of medical radioisotopes in the world, Belgium has unique assets available to roll out these new cancer treatments more broadly, benefiting more patients. We continue to invest in new innovation and production capacity. A new Centralised Radiochemical Facility (CRF) is being constructed by SCK CEN, with the aim of producing enough lutetium-177 by 2026 to treat 15.000 cancer patients per year.

The joint venture PanTera by IBA and SCK CEN works together with TerraPower Isotopes to increase the availability of the rare radioisotope actinium-225, allowing for very targeted and effective cancer radiation.

During the Belgian Presidency of the EU the importance of radioisotopes for medical diagnostics and therapy was emphasized, along with the

increasing need for therapeutic radiopharmaceuticals. The conclusions encompassed transport and the access to source material as well.

In the domain of non-proliferation, we reached political agreement among the EU member states on a revised Euratom safeguards regulation to ensure the continued effectiveness and efficiency of Euratom safeguards.

In the upcoming years, Belgium will be confronted with long-term operation activities coupled with upcoming decommissioning activities of nuclear power reactors. These challenging projects will have to be executed according to the necessary safety, security and safeguards standards. Belgium decided to allow the long term operation of reactors Tihange 3 and Doel 4 with ten years beyond the previously planned phase out dates, until 2035, in order to secure the energy supply.

Meanwhile, the preparation for decommissioning activities in Belgium continues. Decommissioning on this scale presents major challenges, but our experience from dismantling other nuclear sites brings valuable know-how. Belgium also continues to invest in new technologies to increase the re-use and recycling of materials stemming from decommissioning projects, like in our SMELD project where we want to push the boundaries of radioactive metal melting.

In December 2023, we welcomed an ARTEMIS mission, which concluded that Belgium established a robust national infrastructure for the management of radioactive waste and spent fuel, and for the implementation of decommissioning and remediation activities. Belgium remains committed to the Code of Conduct on the Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources since almost two decades and is also committed to implementing the IAEA Guidance on the Management of Disused Radioactive Sources.

Earlier this year, we concluded a broad debate with more than 1500 youths, civil society representatives and experts about long-term storage of high-level and long-lived nuclear waste. As the great interest generated by this debate clearly shows, transparency and public support are crucial when taking complex and sensitive decisions on how and where to store nuclear waste.

When it comes to nuclear security, Belgium continues its efforts on Insider Threat Mitigation, with the organization of a widely attended international

symposium in Brussels last March and a side event organized together with the US during the ICONS Conference. We were happy to see new countries subscribing to information circular 908 (INFCIRC/908) this year and we encourage others to join as well.

Belgium also made progress on the legal front, with the ratification earlier this year of the Joint Protocol Relating to the Application of the Vienna Convention and the Paris Convention, regarding liability in the case of nuclear accidents.

As the current president of the Benelux Union, we are particularly pleased that for the first time in history, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg will simultaneously sit on the IAEA Board in the coming year. [By chance, this occasion coincides with the eightieth anniversary of the Benelux Union, a model of intergovernmental cooperation that is still going strong.] Our combined expertise and strong engagement will form a solid contribution to the Board's work.

Let me conclude by reiterating Belgium's full support to the IAEA and to the Director General in upholding the legal framework and assisting States in their peaceful use of the atom.

I thank you.