

# A catalyst for change

## Integrating nuclear security at major public events

By Inna Pletukhina







Protecting cheering fans, heads of state or global leaders from the threat of a dirty bomb is the aim of integrating nuclear security into the overall security arrangements for major public events. While the primary goal of these efforts is to bolster security at the event itself, they also bring long-term benefits to a country’s overall nuclear security regime.

“For many countries, major public events are a catalyst that makes authorities focus on and prioritize nuclear security,” said Raja Abdul Aziz Raja Adnan, Director of the IAEA’s Division of Nuclear Security. “Such an event may be a target for malicious uses of nuclear or radioactive material that may have been stolen, therefore prompting countries to reassess these threats.”

Nuclear security plays an important role in ensuring the success of a major public event. Measures must be taken to prevent malicious use of nuclear and other radioactive material that has gone missing. The spread of radioactive material at such an event could have a serious impact on people and the environment, including severe social, psychological, political and economic consequences.

When preparing the nuclear security arrangements for a major event, authorities must address factors such as establishing an organizational and coordination structure, threat assessment and mobilizing human and financial resources. The authorities must also ensure access to radiation detection equipment, as well as establish and strengthen relationships between, for example, scientists, security experts, first responders and law enforcement agencies. Upon request by a country, the IAEA supports these efforts.

“When going through the steps of planning and integrating nuclear security measures and systems into the overall security plan for a major event, authorities are exposed to every essential element of a robust national nuclear security regime,” said Elena Paladi, Nuclear Security Officer at the IAEA. “As they identify and address nuclear security gaps and challenges when preparing for the event, they also strengthen the country’s overall nuclear security efforts.”

The long-term benefits of these activities include a greater awareness of nuclear security at all levels of the national security system, stronger detection and response capabilities and structures and increased interoperability between the relevant authorities.

### World Youth Day 2019

In January 2019, Pope Francis, the presidents of Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama and Portugal, and over 300 000 people gathered in Panama City for World Youth Day. In preparation for the event, authorities in Panama worked





with the IAEA to incorporate nuclear security into the overall security arrangements.

Part of these arrangements included the Panamanian authorities issuing an executive decree for a joint task force on security that provided the legal mandate to institutionalize the coordination of nuclear security between the country's relevant authorities.

“Law enforcement and customs officers; units specializing in chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological explosives; and health and other first responders all had to work as a team to prevent, detect and, if necessary, respond to a potential nuclear security event,” said Lieutenant Colonel Alexis De León, Chief of the Joint Security Task Force. He explained that, before the decree, “each had their own mandate, authorities, and command and control structures”.

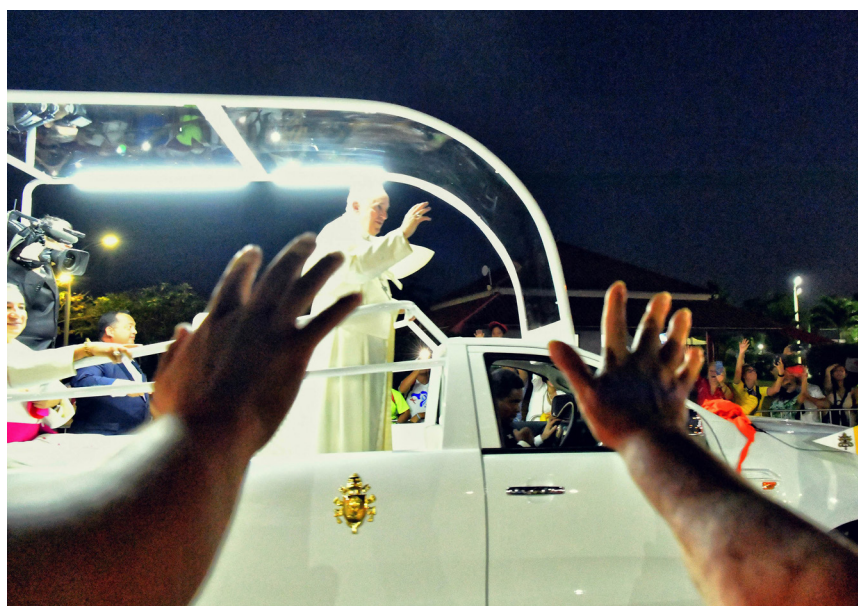
Bringing nuclear security under one authority and one mission establishes a working relationship between the relevant branches for security arrangements. The ability to carry out operations in coordination with other branches creates a foundation for effective response to any potential nuclear security incident, both for major events and in general.

## 2008 Olympic Games

Complementing this foundation are skills and strategies related to radiation detection equipment and its use. Many countries preparing for big public events work with the IAEA to train staff and borrow equipment (read more about nuclear security equipment on page 22). Although the IAEA equipment out on loan is returned, the skills and experience from IAEA training events remain and are used to create a stronger framework for nuclear security detection and response activities.

“China received IAEA nuclear security assistance in relation to the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008,” said Yongde Liu, Director General of China's State Nuclear Security Technology Centre (SNSTC). “We built upon the capacity we obtained with the IAEA's assistance and experience of successfully securing many major public events, and now, in collaboration with the IAEA, we provide radiation detection training at the SNSTC.” (Learn more about training at centres such as SNSTC on page 10).

Since the IAEA first provided assistance for the Olympic Games held in Athens in 2004, it has helped countries to carry out over 50 political, sporting, religious and cultural major public events. These activities are part of the IAEA's broader assistance for countries, upon their request, in preventing, detecting and responding to theft, sabotage, unauthorized access, illegal transfer or other malicious acts involving nuclear or radioactive material.



Photos from World Youth Day 2019 in Panama.

(Photos: D. Calma/IAEA)