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President: Ms MANGKLATANAKUL (Thailand)

Later: Mr SHOJA'AADIN (Yemen)

Later: Ms MANGKLATANAKUL (Thailand)

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Abbreviations used in this record

2030 Agenda	Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
ARASIA	Co-operative Agreement for Arab States in Asia for Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology
ARCAL	Co-operation Agreement for the Promotion of Nuclear Science and Technology in Latin America and the Caribbean
ARTEMIS	Integrated Review Service for Radioactive Waste and Spent Fuel Management, Decommissioning and Remediation
CNS	Convention on Nuclear Safety
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CPF	Country Programme Framework
CPPNM	Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material
CRP	coordinated research project
CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EPR	emergency preparedness and response
FORO	Ibero-American Forum of Radiological and Nuclear Regulatory Agencies
G-77	Group of 77
imPACT	integrated missions of PACT
INSSP	Integrated Nuclear Security Support Plan
IPPAS	International Physical Protection Advisory Service
IRRS	Integrated Regulatory Review Service
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NDT	non-destructive testing

Abbreviations used in this record (continued)

NHSI	Nuclear Harmonization and Standardization Initiative
NPP	nuclear power plant
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NPT Review and Extension Conference	Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NPT Review Conference	Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NSTDC	Nuclear Security Training and Demonstration Centre
NUTEC Plastics	Nuclear Technology for controlling Plastic Pollution
NWFZ	nuclear-weapon-free zone
PACT	Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy
PMOs	Policy-Making Organs
ReNuAL	Renovation of the Nuclear Applications Laboratories
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIT	sterile insect technique
SMR	small and medium sized or modular reactor
SQP	small quantities protocol
TC	technical cooperation
TCF	Technical Cooperation Fund
TPNW	Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
VETLAB Network	Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory Network
WFP	World Food Programme
WMDs	weapons of mass destruction
ZODIAC	Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action

7. General debate and Annual Report for 2022 (continued) (GC(67)/2)

1. Mr ALFASSAM (Kuwait), congratulating the Director General on his reappointment, expressed his country's support for the Director General's efforts to enhance the Agency's work to protect nuclear sites and prevent nuclear incidents.
2. The Agency played a pivotal role in promoting knowledge transfer and capacity building to maximize the benefit of nuclear applications, enhancing nuclear security and safety systems in Member States and applying safeguards under the NPT. Kuwait remained committed to cooperating with the Agency in order to benefit from nuclear energy and build its national capacities with a view to implementing critical socioeconomic development projects. It was also committed to enhancing collaboration with all Member States to harness the atom for peaceful purposes.
3. In that context, Kuwait had continued to engage in technical cooperation with the Agency on projects covering nuclear technology applications in the petroleum industry, the production of genetically modified crops and the feasibility of using SMRs for power generation. It had also proposed four new national projects in the areas of genetically modified crops, groundwater management, modern methods of cancer treatment and monitoring of marine microplastic pollution. Furthermore, Kuwait had participated in every stage of ReNuAL and looked forward to the completion of the third and final stage.
4. With regard to nuclear security, in May and June 2023 Kuwait had received an IPPAS mission to review all the country's laws, government decisions and activities relating to nuclear and radioactive materials. The team had also conducted a number of field visits. Kuwait was striving to strengthen its national physical protection measures and systems in line with the guidance offered by the Agency through IPPAS.
5. Underscoring the Agency's pivotal role in the application of the comprehensive safeguards system, Kuwait renewed its call to Iran to continue cooperating with the Agency in order to settle outstanding issues. Iran should also comply fully with the JCPOA endorsed in UN Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) and work with the Agency to enable it to provide credible assurances of the absence of undeclared nuclear materials and activities in Iran and ensure that it continued to be a non-nuclear-weapon State.
6. Kuwait affirmed its commitment to the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in the Middle East, pursuant to the resolution of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference and the outcomes of the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences. It was essential for Israel to accede to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and place all its nuclear facilities under the Agency's comprehensive safeguards.
7. Although Kuwait affirmed the right of all States to produce, develop and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes within the framework of the NPT, the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other WMDs posed a threat to international peace and security, especially in the light of current global challenges and tensions.
8. In closing, Kuwait confirmed its continued support for the Agency's effective leadership in capacity building to achieve sustainable development, address economic and food crises and strengthen nuclear security and safety systems and the application of safeguards in Member States.

9. Mr REGMI (Nepal), congratulating the Director General on his reappointment, said that his country appreciated the efforts and achievements of the Agency, including the Director General and his team, to promote the safe, secure and peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology in the interests of international peace and security.

10. Nepal was a committed party to, and active participant in, key disarmament-related international treaties and protocols, including the NPT and the SQP, and had a disarmament policy centred on the pursuit of nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear science and technology in strict adherence to the Agency's robust safeguards framework. His country was firmly committed to collaborating with the international community to bring about an end to the arms race and the complete disarmament of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and other WMDs.

11. Nepal had adopted a national nuclear policy in 2007 to regulate, control and monitor the use of nuclear energy in accordance with Agency guidelines. It also set out to enhance national welfare through the peaceful use of nuclear science and take the necessary safety measures for the development and use of nuclear energy, while enhancing public awareness about its benefits and consequences. More recently Nepal had adopted legislation on the use and regulation of radioactive materials in 2020 and 2022, also in compliance with Agency standards.

12. Nepal highly valued its technical support from and cooperation with the Agency since 2012, when it had signed a TC agreement. Their joint endeavours over the years had encompassed a diverse range of projects, many of which had a direct impact on the population's well-being and were closely aligned with efforts to achieve the SDGs. Supportive of ZODIAC as an important tool for tackling COVID-19 and future pandemics, his country looked forward to working closely with Agency on the project so as to strengthen preparedness and response for zoonotic disease outbreaks.

13. With its strategic priorities firmly anchored in the SDGs and its fifteenth national plan, Nepal's overarching objective was to enhance citizens' quality of life and economic prospects through peaceful nuclear applications, with areas such as agriculture, water and environmental management, health care and the advancement of nuclear knowledge featuring prominently in that vision. With the Agency's steadfast support and collaboration, Nepal aimed to foster progress and prosperity driven by the transformative power of nuclear science and technology in areas critical to well-being and sustainable development.

14. The sovereign equality of all Member States and their rightful representation in the Agency's PMOs was of the utmost concern to Nepal. Urging full support for the draft resolution submitted by Kazakhstan on the issue, Nepal appealed to all Member States, the Director General and the Secretariat to address the matter at the earliest opportunity, as the Agency's noble purpose was not served by leaving it unresolved.

15. Nepal remained committed to supporting the Agency's endeavours to build a better world through peaceful use of nuclear technology and engaging constructively in deliberations for the success of the General Conference.

16. Ms GIL (Colombia) said that the election of the Ambassador of Thailand as President of the General Conference demonstrated the commitment of most Member States to the Agency's gender policy.

17. Current geopolitical challenges created an uncertain outlook for the preservation of the Vienna spirit, with multilateralism and consensus building becoming increasingly difficult. Nevertheless, the Agency — a beacon of multilateralism — continued to inspire belief in the power of collaboration through initiatives such as Rays of Hope, producing tangible results that promoted security and development for all countries. The strengthening of multilateralism had always been a firm

objective of Colombia's foreign policy. Her country therefore appealed to Member States to protect the Agency from the confrontations paralysing political dialogue and technical cooperation in other international forums.

18. Highlighting the Director General's re-election by acclamation, she urged Member States to spare no effort in enabling him to fulfil without hindrance his statutory mandate to accelerate the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity.

19. Committed to total peace in accordance with its domestic and foreign policy, Colombia was convinced of the need for nuclear disarmament and advocated the creation and strengthening of NWFZs to counteract the risk of nuclear proliferation in support of that aim.

20. However, a weapon-free world was not enough if hunger and disease predominated, as peace required the enjoyment of economic and social rights by all. Consequently, Colombia adhered to a comprehensive interpretation of the Agency's mandate and considered verification and monitoring, on the one hand, and technical cooperation, on the other, to be mutually reinforcing.

21. Remaining supportive of the strengthening and universalization of the Agency's safeguards regime and nuclear verification activities, her country defended the Agency's impartial and transparent technical and diplomatic pursuit of its verification and monitoring activities to ensure the peaceful nature of nuclear programmes and avoid the risk of proliferation and diversion of material to nuclear weapons production.

22. Troubled by the DPRK's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, Colombia called on the DPRK to comply fully with Security Council resolutions, return to the Agency's safeguards system and cease any military activity that undermined peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. Her country would sponsor the draft resolution on the DPRK.

23. Colombia urged Iran to immediately resume full cooperation with the Agency, especially on outstanding nuclear safeguards issues, and condemned its expulsion of one third of the Agency personnel deployed in the country.

24. Regarding Zaporizhzhya NPP, her country also called for sense to prevail so that the plant could be kept out of a war that should never have taken place. The Director General had said that he wished to be remembered as a man who had done his utmost to prevent a nuclear accident; Colombia would support him in achieving that goal.

25. The Director General had enhanced the transformative impact of the TC programme to achieve the SDGs. Colombia's projects for the 2024–2025 TC cycle focused on establishing a new research reactor to produce radioisotopes for treating lung cancer and strengthening plant pathogen detection and management. Her country was also developing a nuclear law to centralize the regulation of activities involving the peaceful use of nuclear material and technology and was grateful for the Agency's legislative guidance in that area.

26. Colombia appreciated the Director General's initiatives, such as ZODIAC, NUTEC Plastics, Rays of Hope and the promotion of gender equity and women's empowerment in the nuclear field, and thanked the Agency for being the first international actor to assist it during the COVID-19 pandemic.

27. Despite the great challenges posed by the climate crisis, Colombia remained committed to safeguarding its rich biodiversity and protecting the oceans. NUTEC Plastics offered an opportunity to mitigate marine pollution and ensure a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in her region.

28. Her country would continue to support the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme and the Lise Meitner Programme, confident that more Colombian women would be able to benefit from them.

29. The TC programme's diversity and breadth underscored the scope of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy for sustainable development. Colombia called on the main donor countries to recognize the complementarity of the Agency's functions and not to allocate financial resources to one at the expense of another. The TC programme needed sufficient, stable, balanced and sustainable resources to guarantee its essential role in development.

30. As its term as a Board member drew to a close, Colombia expressed appreciation for the constructive and coordinated work carried out during its time as Vice-Chair of the Board and Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Medium Term Strategy 2024–2029. The Agency showed what could be achieved through effective multilateralism — peace-loving countries must therefore support and defend it.

31. Ms VILLATORO TARIO (El Salvador), congratulating the Director General on his re-election, said that her country was pleased with the 2023 Scientific Forum's theme, Nuclear Innovations for Net Zero, which would permit an open discussion on the potential contribution of nuclear power to meet growing power demand in the twenty-first century and to mitigate climate change.

32. El Salvador was considering adding nuclear power to its energy mix and was therefore very interested in developments and progress on small reactors. It was a beneficiary of two interregional TC projects: INT2021, aimed at Member States considering or planning to introduce or expand nuclear power programmes, and INT2023, which supported capacity building for Member States in the use of SMRs and micro reactors for climate change mitigation.

33. El Salvador had applied to participate in Rays of Hope and, as a first step, had received an impACT mission in June 2023 to assess cancer control. Her country also supported and benefited from ZODIAC and NUTEC Plastics. In addition, El Salvador was a member of the Agency's Global Water Analysis Laboratory Network and had participated in its launch at the UN 2023 Water Conference.

34. Her country appreciated the technical cooperation that it received through the TCF, which had contributed to national development and capacity building in the use of nuclear science and technology in priority areas such as health, agriculture, the environment and water resources management.

35. El Salvador recognized the Agency's primary role in ensuring that nuclear energy was used solely for peaceful purposes and had concluded a safeguards agreement, an additional protocol and an SQP, which were essential and reliable verification instruments. It called on States that had not yet done so to accept the application of Agency safeguards to all their nuclear activities by signing safeguards agreements and additional protocols.

36. As a country that belonged to an NWFZ and did not possess WMDs, El Salvador reaffirmed its commitment and right to work for nuclear disarmament as the only guarantee of peace and security. Security built on nuclear deterrence was unsustainable because the existence of such weapons constituted a persistent threat. Preventing their use should be an urgent priority for all States, given the potentially devastating consequences for humankind and the environment, including in the areas of agriculture and food security. El Salvador therefore once again urged all countries possessing WMDs, including nuclear weapons, to take meaningful steps towards their elimination and called on all non-parties to the NPT to accede to the Treaty, which was crucial for international security and peace.

37. Her country backed all actions aimed at strengthening the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime and renewing the international community's commitment to the definitive

elimination of WMDs through multilateral negotiations, in line with the principles of verification, irreversibility and transparency. In that connection, El Salvador had actively participated in the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 NPT Review Conference in August 2023. It was regrettable that the document containing the Chair's recommendations had not been approved, and her country would continue working to help build consensus so as to make meaningful progress on the matter.

38. El Salvador would actively participate in the second Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW, to be held in New York in November and December 2024. Given that the NPT, the TPNW and the CTBT were complementary and would contribute to the ultimate goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world, all countries should promptly accede to them and continue engaging in vital nuclear disarmament efforts, preserving nuclear technology for exclusively peaceful purposes.

39. Lastly, as co-chair of the Group of Friends for Women in Nuclear alongside Spain and Chile, El Salvador stood ready to collaborate with the Agency to achieve gender parity.

40. Mr SKINNER-KLÉE ARENALES (Guatemala) said that the Director General's active and responsible efforts had earned him a well-deserved second term.

41. Troubled by the immense risk of an unprecedented nuclear confrontation or catastrophe, Guatemala maintained its long-held view that complete nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation were essential to ensuring international peace and security and fostering development and well-being. It could not be said that the basic principles of international law and the UN Charter were respected when for more than 580 days, Ukraine — a sovereign country — had been under barbaric military attack by a permanent member of the Security Council that had opted for a war of aggression over dialogue and peace. The Russian Federation's decision had given rise to international destabilization, and its violent and coercive seizure of Ukrainian nuclear facilities ran the serious risk of causing a nuclear catastrophe.

42. His country recognized that, paradoxically, although nuclear energy was essential for development and well-being, its deterrent use in WMDs also posed a serious threat to humanity. Guatemala therefore repudiated the Russian Federation's conduct at Ukraine's NPPs, especially at Zaporizhzhya NPP, which the Russian Federation had surrounded with landmines. Moreover, equipment and infrastructure at the NPP had been damaged, and the Agency had been denied access to verify the plant's status and maintenance in accordance with its mandate. The situation violated the basic principles that the Director General had set out in that regard.

43. Guatemala vehemently called on the Russian Federation to withdraw from the independent sovereign territory of Ukraine, return effective control of all Ukrainian NPPs to Ukraine, and evacuate its troops. The invading power's open aggression, suggestion of the possible tactical use of nuclear weapons and instrumentalization of Ukraine's NPPs in its war strategy violated the most basic norms of law and peaceful, constructive coexistence, posing a huge threat.

44. With regard to Iran's continued non-compliance with its obligations, including the March 2023 Joint Statement, as a State that had signed and ratified the NPT Iran had no credible reason not to implement the Treaty's provisions, in particular the safeguards system. It was of great concern that Iran continued to develop its clandestine nuclear programme and enrich uranium, to no logical peaceful civilian purpose.

45. Guatemala recognized that nuclear energy must be used responsibly in the service of development. Nuclear safety and security should not obstruct, restrict or prejudice the inalienable right of access to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, especially in developing countries such as Guatemala.

46. Member States bore witness to the Agency's importance as an independent, professional and technical body that met its objectives in an impartial manner, especially when applying and verifying compliance with safeguards — a fundamental pillar of the non-proliferation regime.

47. It was important to remember that, in addition to addressing threats or illicit actions involving nuclear material, the Agency also provided valuable services to humanity in the areas of health, agriculture, food, the environment and water conservation. Guatemala reaffirmed its support for, and collaboration with the Agency, in the application of the safeguards regime within the framework of the Comprehensive Capacity-Building Initiative for SSACs and SRAs, thanks to which the country had made significant progress in strengthening its nuclear material accounting and control system. Guatemala was among the seven Member States that had participated in the pilot phase of the initiative from 2020 to 2023. The specialized in-person and virtual training provided on nuclear material accounting guidance, safeguards-specific hardware and software, and detection equipment had been invaluable in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of safeguards implementation in Guatemala in line with its safeguards agreement and related protocols.

48. His country welcomed the Director General's initiatives to promote the Agency's important work to develop the peaceful uses of nuclear energy through nuclear applications: Rays of Hope, ZODIAC, NUTEC Plastics and Atoms4Food. Thanks to them, the Agency was providing Member States with know-how and good practices that offered solutions to the complex challenges facing humanity in the areas of health, agriculture, food, and environmental conservation. Guatemala thanked partners for supporting countries, through the Department of Technical Cooperation, to build capacities and obtain cutting-edge technology for development and the well-being of their populations.

49. His country appreciated the Secretariat's resilience and the Director General's leadership, commitment and professionalism in fulfilling the Agency's mandate in adverse and even dangerous conditions. Member States and peace-loving countries had an obligation to ensure the purely peaceful use of atomic energy; Guatemala therefore expressed its commitment and political will to work constructively towards that end.

50. Mr MYKKÄNEN (Finland), highlighting the major global challenges posed by climate change, said that his country was committed to being among the first Western countries to meet emission reduction targets and move towards carbon neutrality by 2035.

51. In Finnish climate policy, nuclear and renewable energy were complementary. Finland's energy mix included one of the highest shares of renewables in Europe, and, with more than 90% fossil-free electricity, its electricity sector was already largely decarbonized. That could not have been achieved without the significant contribution of nuclear power for more than 45 years. Unit 3 of Olkiluoto NPP — Europe's largest reactor — would open officially the following day, having started commercial operation in April 2023. With that historic achievement, nuclear power would account for over 40% of electricity generation in 2023.

52. Finland was making nuclear history as the first country in the world country to approach the start of deep geological disposal of spent nuclear fuel on a commercial basis with a view to beginning final disposal within the next two years, thereby contributing greatly to nuclear safety. Spent nuclear fuel would be disposed of in the ONKALO geological repository to eliminate the harmful effects of nuclear power generation forever, and Finland was seriously committed to implementing safeguards at the repository, with support from the Agency and the European Commission, so as to eliminate any concerns. The selection of the repository as a permanent solution for used fuel was closely linked to the fact that 70% of Finns supported nuclear power, with record support for increasing its generation.

53. Although Finland aligned itself closely with the statement of the European Union, it also had a strong national interest in and strategy for strengthening and developing nuclear energy domestically,

in Europe and globally. His country fully supported the Agency's work and commended the Director General's efforts to make the Agency a strong, independent, professional and active policymaker in tackling common challenges.

54. The nuclear community's strong collaboration and crucial support had been indispensable to Finland in achieving such a high level of fossil-free electricity. His country would continue providing financial and in-kind support for the Agency's essential role in nuclear security activities.

55. Finland was ever ready to share its experience and expertise in nuclear safety and security with the global community and had cooperated with the African Commission on Nuclear Energy on a project to fully implement safeguards regulation throughout Africa.

56. Finland supported the Agency's work concerning nuclear safety, security and safeguards in Ukraine. The situation was especially critical at Zaporizhzhya NPP, Europe's largest nuclear facility, which had been attacked and illegally seized by the Russian Federation. The situation was unacceptable, and the Russian Federation must immediately withdraw all its armed forces from Ukrainian nuclear facilities, cease its military action, and immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all its military forces from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

57. The safety and security of peaceful nuclear facilities should be guaranteed even in the event of an armed conflict, and it was therefore in the interest of all parties to respect all international nuclear safety and security obligations. The importance of handling the Ukraine crisis for the sake of nuclear safety — in that country and globally — could not be stressed enough.

58. Expressing regret at the major proliferation challenges faced, his country urged Iran to reverse its recent decisions, return to full cooperation with the Agency and allow it to carry out its mandated verification activities. Diplomatic efforts were needed to revive the JCPOA — a major contribution to nuclear non-proliferation.

59. The DPRK's continued nuclear and ballistic missile programme was also of concern. Finland urged the country to engage in discussions to achieve sustainable peace and security.

60. Finland would strive to support the Agency in implementing its core mandate and fulfilling its independent expert role. It also aimed to boost the use of new technologies, especially SMRs, as their promising use for district heating enjoyed significant popular support. His country looked forward to further engagement with Member States on the new power and heating possibilities offered by such technology.

61. Throughout its history, the Agency had been a crucial forum for discussing common challenges, with an independent Secretariat that played an important role in addressing problems in certain geographical locations. It was therefore essential to give the Agency, including the Secretariat, the support that it deserved in order to safeguard the future of nuclear power and provide sustainable climate change solutions.

62. Mr FACETTI (Paraguay), congratulating the Director General on his reappointment, said that his country was confident in the Director General's continued exceptional, objective and impartial work.

63. Paraguay recognized the important contribution of nuclear techniques to the health sector and welcomed the Agency's efforts to meet Member States' capacity building needs in that area. It also stressed the importance of nuclear technology in food safety and security, animal health and production, environmental protection, water resources management, and other areas related to the use of radioisotopes and ionizing radiation.

64. Encouraging the Agency to continue helping Member State to obtain and develop technologies to meet their needs, his country expressed appreciation for the donation of a linear accelerator for clinical use to the National Cancer Institute. The linear accelerator enabled a vital increase in cancer treatment, with some 80 additional patients benefiting each month.

65. His country also supported other Agency initiatives to promote nuclear technology, such as the International Symposium on Isotope Hydrology, held in July 2023, which had fostered the exchange of relevant experiences, trends and research needs. In addition, the newly launched Global Water Analysis Laboratory Network would enable the sharing of research and experience in water chemistry and the water cycle, with the ultimate aim of achieving universal and equitable access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation and hygiene services, and improving water quality globally, in accordance with SDG 6 and the Water Action Agenda.

66. Paraguay welcomed the launch of Atoms4Food, aimed at helping Member States use nuclear and isotopic techniques to enhance food production and security, agricultural planning and nutritional programming, and expressed its interest in participating in the initiative.

67. The Agency continued to play an essential role in nuclear safety, and Paraguay appreciated its continuous efforts to investigate and report on States' nuclear programmes and activities. Taking a keen interest in safety responses to nuclear developments, his country highlighted the action taken to improve compliance with the safeguards regime in order to guarantee the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The CSAs concluded between the Agency and 178 Member States, many of which also had an additional protocol, helped ensure that those countries were not pursuing clandestine nuclear weapon programmes.

68. Emphasizing the importance of nuclear non-proliferation and of the safeguards regime as the cornerstone of the NPT, Paraguay expressed deep concern about the risk posed to peace and security by nuclear activities that were undeclared or not exclusively peaceful. His country reaffirmed its determination to completely eliminate nuclear weapons and chart a way forward towards the full and effective implementation of the TPNW, which explicitly and completely prohibited nuclear weapons under international law, as had long been the case for biological and chemical weapons. His country welcomed the filling of that gap in the international legal anti-WMD regime and called on all States to comply fully with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law. The prohibition of nuclear weapons was a fundamental step towards achieving and maintaining a weapon-free world.

69. Paraguay encouraged NWFZs to be established as a matter of priority with a view to achieving complete nuclear disarmament under effective international control and expressed its concern about practices to develop a new generation of nuclear weapons and extend the life of existing arsenals.

70. The enormous risk of a nuclear accident precipitated by the situation at Zaporizhzhya NPP was troubling. Paraguay called strongly for a cessation of hostilities and appreciated the Director General's immense efforts to ensure the permanent presence of Agency inspectors at Ukrainian nuclear facilities.

71. Paraguay welcomed the international community's continued and patient efforts to revive negotiations regarding the DPRK's nuclear programme, which threatened the integrity of the non-proliferation regime. It expressed concern over the nuclear tests conducted in 2006, 2009, 2013, 2016 and 2017 and urged the DPRK to take practical measures to immediately abandon its nuclear programme, in line with Security Council resolutions.

72. Paraguay reiterated its deep concern regarding the presence of uranium particles of anthropogenic origin at two sites in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the country's recent revocation of the designation of several experienced Agency inspectors, which undoubtedly had a serious and direct impact on the Agency's ability to carry out its verification activities properly, especially at enrichment facilities.

Paraguay urged Iran to cooperate effectively so that the Agency could provide credible assurances that its nuclear material and activities were for peaceful purposes and to work with the Agency in a serious, credible and sustainable manner towards implementing the March 2023 Joint Statement.

73. Cooperation on security was indispensable for sustained nuclear development. Paraguay therefore stressed the importance of the Nuclear Security Plan 2022–2025 and the need to address the challenge of nuclear security through the competent international forums.

74. Paraguay appreciated regional efforts to exchange experiences and collaborate on shared problems within the framework of FORO.

75. Lastly, he emphasized that the TC programme was the cornerstone of horizontal cooperation, as demonstrated by the high project implementation rate, with Paraguay having one of the highest rates in the region. His country therefore reaffirmed its commitment to continued collaboration to promote the peaceful use of nuclear techniques to achieve the SDGs.

Mr Shoja'aadin (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair.

76. Ms GARCÍA GUTIÉRREZ (Costa Rica) said that the Director General's re-election reaffirmed Member States' wide support for his leadership and his vision for the Agency in addressing some of the most pressing global challenges and promoting international peace and security and sustainable development.

77. Through its development of civilian applications of nuclear energy and technology, the Agency provided capacity building and solutions of the highest global standard in priority matters such as human health, including cancer treatment; industry and agriculture, through pest control and crop resilience; and more recently marine pollution and emerging zoonotic threats. The economic and social benefits derived from its activities made it a driver of development. The TC programme, as the Agency's vehicle for achieving the SDGs, highlighted the intrinsic link not only between development and knowledge, but also between development and disarmament.

78. The Agency played a central role in strengthening nuclear and radiation safety worldwide; safety standards must continue to be strengthened to ensure an integrated, comprehensive and coherent set of high-quality guidelines to protect people and the environment.

79. As a low-carbon energy source, nuclear power could support climate change mitigation, counteracting global dependence on fossil fuels and its devastating effect on the environment. In that regard, Costa Rica was closely following industrial developments and global governance in the area of radioactive waste management, which should be enhanced through tried and tested technologies based on the preservation of soil, ocean and atmospheric ecosystems. Costa Rica would host preparatory negotiations for the 2024 UN Ocean Conference, which would provide an opportunity to share information on how nuclear and isotopic techniques could help achieve cleaner seas and oceans.

80. The nuclear disarmament obligation enshrined in the NPT had yet to be fulfilled, and the commitments under the Treaty were increasingly far from being met. The need for instruments such as the TNPW to complement and strengthen the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime — with the NPT as its cornerstone — was clearer than ever. Costa Rica could not remain silent as it observed the utterly irresponsible deepening of global inequalities as military budgets increased exponentially.

81. The General Conference could not ignore the developments at Zaporizhzhya NPP in Ukraine, in particular the reportedly fragile state of the seven indispensable pillars. Her country deplored the difficulties to which Ukraine had been subjected in meeting its safeguards obligations. Costa Rica was also very concerned about the risks to nuclear material and operations at the plant, and the conditions

endured by the plant's operational personnel. The physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from the Russian Federation's military presence inevitably increased the possibility of human error, with potentially serious humanitarian consequences.

82. In view of that situation, Costa Rica had decided to submit, together with Canada, Finland and Singapore, a resolution on nuclear safety and safeguards in Ukraine, in an interregional effort to support the Agency and the Director General in fulfilling their mandates.

83. As to the Iranian nuclear programme, Costa Rica expressed its concern at Iran's increasing inventories of enriched uranium and its enrichment to levels that cast serious doubt on the peaceful nature of its nuclear programme. Iran had limited the Agency's verification authority and had failed to provide credible technical explanations for its outstanding safeguards issues. Her country therefore called on Iran to comply with its obligations under its NPT safeguards agreements.

84. Recognizing the Agency's progress on gender parity, Costa Rica encouraged the continued promotion of gender in all policies and practices.

85. Lastly, her country reaffirmed its commitment to work with all States towards peace, non-proliferation, safeguards strengthening, and greater promotion of the peaceful applications of nuclear energy for development.

86. Ms MURILLO CENTENO (Nicaragua), congratulating the Director General on his reappointment and commending the Secretariat on its work, said that Nicaragua's constitution rooted the country's international relations in friendship, complementarity and solidarity among peoples and reciprocity among States, recognized the principle of the peaceful settlement of international disputes and proscribed the use of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in internal and international conflicts. As a signatory and member of the world's first NWFZ, her country reaffirmed its commitment to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world.

87. Nicaragua appreciated the Agency's extraordinary support and work, which had enabled 149 countries to receive direct assistance through TC projects, CRPs to develop new technology, and highlighted the role of the Collaborating Centres and Member State institutions that supported the Agency's activities.

88. The easing of COVID-19 restrictions in many countries had enabled the welcome resumption of in-person training, events and expert missions, and Nicaragua appreciated the Agency's efforts in that regard. With Agency support and the involvement of more than 11 ministries and national institutions, her country was implementing national and regional projects in the areas of human health, energy, food safety, radiation safety and the environment.

89. Through Rays of Hope, Nicaragua would soon receive a mammography unit for the Bertha Calderón Roque Hospital to support early diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. The unit would add to the more than 30 mammography devices in the public health system, which provided free health care to women throughout the country.

90. The Agency had done commendable work on ZODIAC, NUTEC Plastics, Rays of Hope and climate change initiatives, which had all played an important role in mobilizing financial resources from Member States and non-traditional partners. Nicaragua also appreciated the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme, in which 68 students from 46 Member States were participating and which, for the third year, had supported women to pursue master's degree programmes related to nuclear energy.

91. At the regional level, she highlighted initiatives by Women in Nuclear ARCAL to support women's equitable participation in nuclear science and technology, including the publication of the guide 'Somos Potencia', which highlighted the fact that there remained obstacles to achieving gender

balance in the nuclear sector. ARCAL's training and coordination work during 2022 had enabled Nicaragua's NLOs and national coordinators to take part in face-to-face meetings, and the Agency should therefore continue strengthening and promoting the regional cooperation programme.

92. Her Government reiterated its support for the work of the Director General and the Agency and recognized the valuable contribution of all those involved in the TC programme. Nicaragua would continue to contribute to global anti-terrorism efforts, uphold international law and reject the use of force, in the interests of peace and international security.

93. Ms MUÑOZ MERA (Ecuador) said that her country welcomed the Director General's re-election and appreciated the Secretariat's work.

94. Ecuador promoted peace and universal disarmament, condemned the use of WMDs and was committed to nuclear non-proliferation — a commitment borne out by its membership in the first NWFZ, covering a densely populated area of the world, and by its rejection of non-peaceful nuclear programmes.

95. Acceding to the TPNW and the NPT should be a priority among the international community so as to ensure global and regional security. Highlighting the efforts made at the meeting of the working group on further strengthening the NPT review process and at the recently held first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 NPT Review Conference, Ecuador urged countries to maintain a constructive spirit that promoted multilateralism and restored confidence in the process.

96. Ecuador supported the Agency's verification and safeguards system and encouraged proposals and endeavours relating to non-proliferation, including the reduction of nuclear arsenals and the establishment of NWFZs. Her country recognized the Agency as the authority competent to verify and ensure compliance with the safeguards agreements signed by Member States, in line with the NPT and the Agency's Statute, so as to prevent the diversion of nuclear expertise, technology and material for military purposes. Ecuador therefore underscored the importance of universal adherence to the Agency's safeguards system, in particular by countries that were currently outside the system. In line with its principled position on nuclear non-proliferation, Ecuador firmly believed that all NPT States Parties had the inalienable right to research, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination. That right was conditional on the faithful application of the regime, which established non-negotiable obligations that must be fulfilled in full transparency and without delay. Ecuador therefore called on Iran to comply with all the commitments arising from its safeguards agreement.

97. The safety and security of nuclear material and radioactive sources must be regulated and sustained. In view of the potential consequences of the accidental or malicious misuse of such material and nuclear technology, States had a national responsibility to spare no effort in controlling them as part of a commitment also shared with the international community.

98. Ecuador rejected the Russian Federation's war launched against Ukraine in February 2022 in violation of international and humanitarian law. Thanking the Director General and his team for their tireless and timely efforts to maintain safety and security at nuclear facilities in Ukraine, Ecuador highlighted the importance of the visits made to those facilities, in particular Zaporizhzhya NPP. The imminent escalation of the conflict and the unceasingly bellicose tone of discourse were of concern. Ecuador again called for rapprochement that would lead to a cease-fire and constructive dialogue to end the war.

99. On a more optimistic note, the Agency's efforts to bolster initiatives such as Rays of Hope, NUTEC Plastics, ZODIAC and Atoms4Food supported peace and development and promoted the

multiple benefits of the peaceful uses of atomic energy to tackle climate change and implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

100. Ecuador supported the Agency's activities to ensure the application of international safety norms and standards during the discharge of treated water from Fukushima Daiichi NPP and recognized the Japanese Government's will to ensure that the water was discharged safely. Nevertheless, as a country that bordered the Pacific Ocean and had an important fishing industry and economically vulnerable areas, Ecuador would continue to pay close attention to the Agency's technical reports on the topic in order to prevent potential risks to human health and the environment.

101. Ecuador praised the Agency's activities to boost women's participation in nuclear science, technology and applications and the support provided to develop applications to achieve sustainable development. In that regard, her country appreciated NUTEC Plastics and Agency support provided to strengthen human resources in the areas of hydrology and the marine environment and to establish and equip a microplastics laboratory in the Galapagos Islands.

102. Ecuador supported the strengthening of Rays of Hope so as to further promote the role of nuclear medicine in combating cancer, especially in low- and middle-income countries. The Agency should also continue to build on the VETLAB Network as part of the ZODIAC initiative.

103. With Agency support, Ecuador had made progress in its national TC programme for 2022–2023, which was focused on radiation safety, medical services safety, water resources management, mutation breeding techniques to improve the resilience of banana plants to their major diseases, and pesticide residue monitoring. During 2023, it had also opened an irradiation centre, had acquired a high performance liquid chromatography mass detector and had strengthened its Secondary Standard Dosimetry Laboratory, among other things.

104. Agency support provided in the context of natural disasters was also noteworthy. Following the earthquake in Ecuador in March 2023, her country had received two on-site technical missions, which had worked with national experts to assess civil structures and buildings through NDT.

105. Her country appreciated the Agency's cooperation to tackle tropical race 4 — a pest that caused Fusarium wilt in banana plants and was jeopardizing the banana industry and food security in producing countries — and requested further Agency support. As a sign of its confidence in the Agency, Ecuador had already pledged its contribution to the TC programme for 2024, at the level recommended by the Agency.

106. In closing, Ecuador emphasized the importance that it attached to ARCAL and to the Agency's TC activities more broadly, expressing appreciation for the professional work of the Department of Technical Cooperation.

107. Mr PAPIKYAN (Armenia) congratulated the Director General on his reappointment and commended his tireless work at the helm of the Agency.

108. Highlighting the 30th anniversary of Armenia's membership, he said that his country had benefited immensely from the Agency's valuable expertise and technical assistance and cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy, science and technology and had supported and facilitated the Agency's activities to promote an effective safeguards regime, high standards of nuclear safety and security, and access to nuclear technology and applications in accordance with the Statute, General Conference resolutions and relevant international conventions.

109. Seeking to further facilitate the Agency's core functions and activities, Armenia had submitted its candidature for Board membership for 2023–2025. If elected, it would act fairly and constructively and support dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation among Member States to promote

the Agency's core objectives. Given the importance of the nuclear sector for Armenia, it would continue to champion nuclear safety, security and safeguards, balanced appropriately with the TC programme, which it would continue to support strongly. It would also continue to back the Agency's activities in the area of nuclear applications for human health, food security, agricultural development, zoonotic disease control, environmental protection, green energy transition and climate change mitigation. Armenia needed Member States' valuable support in order to fulfil those goals.

110. Nuclear energy was important for ensuring a stable and sustainable energy sector in Armenia, which adhered to high standards of nuclear safety and security in the operation and large-scale modernization of the Metsamor NPP. His country was proud to note that no nuclear or radiological accidents had been recorded during the NPP's operational history.

111. The Government had approved a project to extend the operational period of the NPP's second power unit until 2036, enabling Armenia to further modernize safety systems and investigate and justify the unit's remaining lifetime. In that regard, the Agency's priority of assisting Member States to implement and improve programmes for ageing management and the safe long term operation of nuclear installations was welcome. In parallel, studies continued for the construction of a new power unit, which might replace the current unit once its extended operational period expired.

112. With the Agency's comprehensive support, Armenia planned to establish a nuclear energy programme implementing organization and appreciated the valuable Agency expertise provided at a working meeting held in Yerevan in July 2023 on the role and responsibilities of that organization and the owner/operator, and on the development of a comprehensive report.

113. Attaching high priority to enhanced nuclear and radiation safety and the development of a safety culture, Armenia implemented all its obligations under the relevant conventions and had received several safety review missions to verify its compliance with international safety standards.

114. Several areas of good performance had been identified in Armenia's National Reports to the Joint Eighth and Ninth Review Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the CNS, and his country had hosted a regional workshop on the application of Level 2 and 3 of probabilistic safety assessments in July 2023.

115. Armenian experts actively contributed to Agency initiatives such as the NHSI Regulatory Track and participated in four working groups of the International Generic Ageing Lessons Learned project.

116. The Agency's work in human health made a crucial contribution to the SDGs. Armenia highly valued the Agency's continued support for national cancer control programmes and welcomed Rays of Hope, which should be expanded to help more States — in particular developing States — to overcome the burden of cancer.

117. In view of existing and emerging nuclear security threats, Armenia consistently strengthened its nuclear security regime in close cooperation with its partners and the Agency. With their valuable support, it had recently finished rebuilding the perimeters of the Metsamor NPP, as recommended by an IPPAS mission, and continued to enhance that aspect of nuclear security at its NPP. His country was actively engaged in the work of the Nuclear Security Guidance Committee and provided in-kind contributions to develop training materials for the NSTDC.

118. Armenia reiterated its principled position that peaceful nuclear facilities, including associated facilities, should in no circumstances become the target of an armed attack or threat of attack. The international community must think proactively to achieve viable national mechanisms and the necessary level of international cooperation.

119. Armenia strongly supported the seven indispensable pillars and five principles, which should be the bare minimum for ensuring the safety and security of nuclear facilities during armed conflicts and commended the devoted work of the Director General and the Agency's staff in that regard.

120. In conclusion, he expressed his country's full support and appreciation for the Agency's central role in promoting the peaceful, safe and secure use of nuclear science and technology for development.

121. Mr SILVA (Angola) said that his country welcomed the recent membership of Cabo Verde and The Gambia, which strengthened the Agency's diversity and reach, and looked forward to collaborating closely with both countries to further their shared objectives.

122. Congratulating the Director General on his re-election, Angola thanked him for his dynamic and invaluable leadership. His Rays of Hope initiative was a beacon for global health initiatives, and his championing of environmental sustainability through programmes like NUTEC Plastics emphasized his comprehensive and versatile approach to the myriad challenges faced.

123. The pressing challenges of the time were impossible to ignore. The current geopolitical tensions had had significant repercussions on energy and food security, concurrently elevating nuclear security concerns, especially with regard to the Zaporizhzhya NPP. Those events served as a stark reminder of the world's deep interconnectedness and underscored the urgency of the Agency's mission.

124. Angola had fortified its commitment to nuclear security with the resumption of its INSSP mission and extended its heartfelt thanks to the team, whose unwavering commitment and unparalleled expertise had been instrumental in advancing that critical initiative.

125. The Agency's role in promoting the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technology was more crucial than ever. Member States bore a collective responsibility to further those aims, which was made even more pressing by current global challenges.

126. Angola emphasized the importance of fostering international collaboration in areas such as nuclear medicine, agriculture and clean energy — all vital for sustainable development and global well-being.

127. His country encouraged Member States to reaffirm their shared commitment to the Agency's noble objectives and make unified and focused efforts to build a secure, sustainable future able to address present and future challenges.

128. Mr ASSAF (Lebanon), congratulating the Director General on his reappointment, said that, day after day, the Agency consolidated its double role as a guarantor of global nuclear security in the face of the threats posed by nuclear proliferation and as an international platform for strengthening the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Both functions were increasingly important, given the rising geopolitical tensions around the globe. The international community needed credible international organizations capable of operating in accordance with objective standards and setting scientific boundaries with regard to controversial issues.

129. Commending the Agency for its successful management of various important programmes and activities regarding the peaceful uses of nuclear technology, in particular ZODIAC, NUTEC Plastics and Rays of Hope, he expressed his country's support for the Director General's efforts to develop new programmes in the service of sustainable development, such as Atoms4Food, which Lebanon hoped would have a tangible impact on global food security.

130. Noting the Agency's continued efforts to provide technical cooperation with a view to bridging the gap between developed and least developed countries in access to nuclear knowledge, experts and technology and the associated development benefits of nuclear energy, he conveyed his country's great

appreciation for the technical assistance received from the Agency, which had been a constant source of support for the efforts of the Lebanese Atomic Energy Commission.

131. During its current presidency of ARASIA, Lebanon was continuing to make tremendous efforts to achieve the main objectives of the agreement, namely to use nuclear technologies to combat counterfeiting and the illegal trade in art and antiquities, promote the early diagnosis and treatment of cancer, enhance food safety and security, and identify places affected by land and sea pollution and understand the sources of pollution.

132. The Agency's safeguards system was a fundamental pillar of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. Lebanon was therefore considering adopting a protocol additional to its safeguards agreement and was taking steps to enhance the capacity of its regulatory authority accordingly. As the application of safeguards in the Middle East region was of strategic importance to the success of the non-proliferation regime, it was gravely worrying that fundamental obstacles presented by a single party lay in the way of its success. Israel was the only non-party to the NPT in the region and the only party to possess nuclear capabilities outside all systems of international oversight, a fact which posed a constant and serious threat to the security and stability of the region and the goal of non-proliferation.

133. In that connection, Lebanon had presided over the 2023 session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, held pursuant to UN General Assembly decision 73/546 of 22 December 2018. Lebanon welcomed both the procedural and substantive progress made by the conference and called on all parties that had not participated in the preceding sessions of the conference to review their position and to participate positively and constructively in the process in pursuit of the shared goal of ridding the Middle East of WMDs and, in turn, bolstering regional and international peace and security.

134. As a member of Women in Nuclear IAEA, his country commended the Director General's commitment to the plan for achieving gender equality within the Secretariat. He also highlighted the important impact of both the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme and the Lise Meitner Programme, investment in which was bound to pay dividends in the long term by making the nuclear field more balanced, resilient and efficient.

135. Mr Cissé (Côte d'Ivoire) expressed condolences to the Governments and people of Libya and Morocco following the recent natural disasters.

136. He said that the Director General's reappointment was recognition of the achievements made during his first term of office, despite the global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic during the preceding two years.

137. Notwithstanding the nuclear community's endeavours to strengthen nuclear safety worldwide, the risk of a nuclear accident or the use of nuclear or other radioactive material for malicious purposes persisted. Côte d'Ivoire appreciated the valiant efforts made by the Director General and the Agency in recent years to ensure the peaceful uses of nuclear technology, nuclear safety and security, and nuclear non-proliferation.

138. His country warmly welcomed Cabo Verde and The Gambia; their membership broadened the Agency's reach and illustrated Africa's commitment to achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world.

139. In view of the ever evolving nuclear security challenges and risks, the Agency, in close coordination with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, should persevere in its efforts to encourage States to accede to the Amendment to the CPPNM and the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism.

140. Côte d'Ivoire supported Agency initiatives to promote the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technology for development and well-being, including ZODIAC, and called for the effective implementation of the Nuclear Security Plan 2022–2025.

141. Noting that women accounted for 33% of the Agency's staff, he expressed his country's endorsement of the gender equality initiative and scholarships for women in the nuclear field. In addition, Côte d'Ivoire had joined Rays of Hope in 2022 and strongly encouraged its extension to other developing countries.

142. The theme of the 2023 Scientific Forum, Nuclear Innovations for Net Zero, was of great interest to Côte d'Ivoire, given that nuclear power, including SMRs, offered a credible alternative in the face of soaring fossil fuel prices and climate change challenges.

143. Côte d'Ivoire supported the Agency's activities to bolster nuclear safety and security and promote the peaceful uses of nuclear technology for development in Member States. In addition to ratifying the main nuclear-related agreements, the President of Côte d'Ivoire had agreed to be designated West Africa's Champion for peaceful nuclear science and technology as part of the African Commission on Nuclear Energy's Group of Champions initiative.

144. To further promote the peaceful use of nuclear technology, his country, in partnership with the WFP, had created the Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition — the first in Africa and third in the world — to help African countries develop and implement sustainable policies and programmes to achieve zero hunger and tackle all forms of malnutrition, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Agency's new Atoms4Food initiative.

145. In addition, it had opened a national oncology and radiotherapy centre and had established the Abidjan Institute of Nuclear Medicine, and, with financial support from the Republic of Korea, it was building a second oncology and radiotherapy centre in Grand-Bassam.

146. All those initiatives were a tribute to the excellent cooperation between his country and the Agency. Côte d'Ivoire greatly appreciated the multifaceted support that it received through the TC programme, including in agriculture, the environment, scientific research, energy planning, animal production and health, radiopharmacy, radiation therapy, radiation protection and, above all, nuclear medicine.

147. Given Côte d'Ivoire's immense needs regarding the peaceful uses of nuclear technology, and nuclear safety and security, his Government would welcome further support from the Agency and bilateral partners in the priority areas defined in its CPF for 2022–2027 in order to strengthen nuclear and radiological safety infrastructure; improve laboratory services and access to affordable high-quality cancer diagnosis and treatment; enhance livestock production and national capacities in food safety and quality control; and improve energy planning.

148. Concluding, he reaffirmed his country's strong support for the Agency and the Director General and expressed appreciation for the invaluable assistance provided in preparation for the African Cup of Nations scheduled for January and February 2024.

149. Mr OLIVA (Cuba) recalled that 26 September — the previous day — was International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, an event originally proposed by his country and supported by NAM.

150. The existence of more than 12 000 nuclear weapons, the continuous modernization and deployment of new nuclear weapon systems, and increasing global military expenditure demonstrated that simply reducing nuclear risk was not enough — the resources allocated to those activities must be redirected to sustainable development and the promotion of peace.

151. Cuba remained firmly committed to multilateralism and to the achievement of nuclear disarmament in a transparent, verifiable and irreversible manner, for which purpose the universalization of the TPNW would be crucial. It would continue to support the Agency's important work in promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

152. The recent G-77 Summit of Heads of State and Government, hosted by Cuba in its capacity as Chair, had acknowledged that greater promotion of science and cooperation was essential for socioeconomic development, especially in developing countries.

153. Against a complex international backdrop marked by multidimensional crises, it was only right to recognize the Agency's efforts to fulfil its statutory mandate to address global health and environmental problems, among others, through numerous initiatives such as Rays of Hope, NUTEC Plastics and ZODIAC, all of which Cuba fully supported.

154. The TC programme made a significant contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and, in that regard, the work of the Division for Latin America and the Caribbean was commendable. Cuba had benefited from cooperation and had demonstrated strong commitment to national and regional projects, in particular under ARCAL, which would soon celebrate its 40th anniversary.

155. The valuable support provided by the Agency to address damage caused by a fire at the supertanker base in Matanzas had enabled Cuba to obtain environmental and air quality monitoring equipment to collect data for decision making. The additional support provided following Hurricane Ian, including mobile X-ray equipment for four hospitals and equipment to detect environmental contaminants and determine water quality, was also appreciated.

156. Highlighting the Agency's in-person and virtual training activities, he expressed Cuba's appreciation for the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme and the Lise Meitner Programme for promoting the advancement of women in the nuclear field. It was also pleasing that the proportion of women the Agency's staff, including at senior grades, stood at its the highest figure to date.

157. Cuba set great store by nuclear and radiation safety, nuclear security and nuclear safeguards and their integration in the use of nuclear applications, as demonstrated by the updating of the current legal framework to reinforce those principles and strengthen action taken by the national regulatory authority. His country had also hosted a regional meeting on the authorization process in safety assessments for medical and industrial facilities, enabling it to share experiences with other Latin American countries.

158. Cuba had submitted its second national report to the Joint Eighth and Ninth Review Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the CNS, with its promotion of safety culture being identified as an area of good performance.

159. Building on the successful experience and innovative teaching methods of the Schools on Safety Leadership, the Agency should consider establishing a School on Safety Culture to enhance the vision and capabilities of personnel in relation to risk minimization and the prevention of accidents due to radiation sources.

160. Cuba highlighted the work done by FORO. The innovative results achieved together with the Agency had helped improve nuclear and radiation safety and security in the Ibero-American region.

161. The intensification of the US embargo imposed on Cuba more than 60 years previously affected his country's work with the Agency. The unilateral coercive measures forced Cuba to obtain technology and training from distant countries, prevented it from participating in regional projects, and prohibited companies from the USA or those with capital or technology of US origin from selling equipment to Cuba to implement nuclear techniques because of the risk of harsh sanctions. That made it more costly

and difficult for not only Cuba but also for the Secretariat to acquire scientific equipment needed for TC projects involving his country — a fact that some tried to ignore — and delayed their execution. Cuba denounced those unjust, extraterritorial measures, which hindered the full exercise of its inalienable right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

162. Cuba stood alongside all countries subjected to unilateral coercive measures restricting their sovereignty and development. True to its tradition of solidarity, it put at the disposal of all countries, especially developing nations, its human resources and all the capacities acquired over years of successful cooperation with the Agency aimed at enhancing the global development of uses of nuclear technology for peace and sustainable development.

163. He concluded by welcoming the Director General's re-election and reaffirming Cuba's firm support and will to make a humble contribution towards achieving atoms for peace and development.

Ms Mangklatanakul (Thailand), President, resumed the Chair.

164. Mr GRANT (Jamaica), welcoming the Director General's reappointment, said that his country applauded the achievements reflected in the 2022 Annual Report. The launch of initiatives such as Rays of Hope and Atoms4NetZero spoke volumes about the Agency's commitment to fulfilling its mandate to use nuclear technology for peace, health and prosperity. Given the need to respond to evolving global realities, the Agency's efforts to focus attention on new and emerging issues, such as artificial intelligence, plastic pollution and infectious diseases, were likewise welcome.

165. Jamaica was committed to ensuring its ability to leverage science, energy and technology for the benefit of its people and economy. Accordingly, in 2022 it had launched its national Science, Technology and Innovation Policy, which envisioned those three areas as essential tools to advance national development, increase global competitiveness and improve quality of life.

166. His country's partnership with the Agency had proven invaluable in strengthening its capacity to use nuclear energy and technology for development. In the area of human health, the 2022 opening of Jamaica's first public nuclear medicine centre, at the University of the West Indies Hospital, and the expansion of the radiotherapy centre at St Joseph's Hospital had yielded positive results. The Agency had therefore contributed immensely to bolstering the quality of health care provided to the Jamaican populace and the wider Caribbean region. The Agency should continue focusing on cancer control through Rays of Hope and PACT.

167. Jamaica had signed an agreement to deliver a self-shielded irradiator for the new irradiation facility to be established at the International Centre for Environmental and Nuclear Sciences. The irradiator, expected to be delivered by the end of 2023, would further expedite ongoing work on pest control using the SIT and would complement national efforts in mutation breeding, thereby supporting improved crop production. Such initiatives would advance Jamaica's food security agenda and represented a step towards infusing more scientific research and innovation into the agricultural sector.

168. Similarly, a scientific research-based approach to water management was needed, especially as that precious resource was becoming limited through drought and other climate change effects. The Agency had proven a key partner in strengthening the analytical capacities of the Water Resources Authority by providing equipment and training in isotopic techniques to improve water resources management.

169. Jamaica appreciated the support provided by the Agency to achieve its firm objective of building its human capital and expertise in science and technology and welcomed the signing, in July 2023, of Practical Arrangements between the Agency and the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies in education and training on the peaceful uses of nuclear applications. His country also welcomed the Agency's programmes to encourage women to pursue careers in nuclear-related fields, as those

efforts were in keeping with his Government's endeavours to encourage women and girls to harness their skills in science, technology, arts, engineering and mathematics. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme and the Lise Meitner Programme were therefore greatly valued.

170. At the regional level, ARCAL's crucial role could not be over emphasized. Through the International Centre for Environmental and Nuclear Sciences, Jamaica had collaborated with the Agency on a project for building capacity and sustaining national regulatory bodies to ensure the safe application of nuclear technology across the 13 Agency Member States within the Caribbean Community. Against that background, Jamaica was pleased to have hosted in 2023 regional training on customs operations with radioactive materials, a coordination meeting and training on body composition assessment using stable isotopes and an event on networking and cooperation among regulatory bodies in the Caribbean Member States. It looked forward to hosting a regional workshop for senior leaders on developing national policies for the safety and security of radioactive materials in December 2024.

171. In closing, Jamaica reaffirmed its dedication and commitment to the work of the Agency, which remained critical in promoting safeguards applications for the peaceful uses of nuclear technology and non-proliferation.

172. Mr HORVATIĆ (Croatia) said that his country congratulated the Director General on his well-deserved reappointment and looked forward to continuing its cooperation with the Agency.

173. Croatia appreciated the continued efforts and commitment of the Director General and the Agency to ensure nuclear safety and security in Ukraine and maintain Agency safeguards on nuclear materials and activities during the Russian Federation's invasion. Military operations in the vicinity of Zaporizhzhya NPP — Europe's largest nuclear facility — significantly increased the risk of a nuclear accident or incident, compromising the seven indispensable pillars and above all endangering the population of Ukraine and beyond. Therefore, in order to ensure the highest standards of nuclear safety, security and safeguards, the Russian Federation must join the international community in treating NPPs as demilitarized zones.

174. Deeply concerned by Iran's decision to withdraw Agency inspectors' permission to conduct verification activities under its NPT safeguards agreement at enrichment facilities, Croatia called on Iran to resume cooperation with the Agency so that it could carry out that task, and to provide evidence that its nuclear programme was exclusively peaceful.

175. In 2023, the unprecedented, severe consequences of climate change in the form of wildfires, severe storms and floods had been witnessed around the world, including in Europe, with loss of human lives and enormous material damage. Such events served as a reminder that all countries needed to work harder to lessen their fossil fuel dependence and reduce their carbon footprint.

176. While nuclear technology advances created global opportunities, they also generated challenges in strengthening and modernizing national legal and regulatory frameworks to enable SMR use as a key element in the transformation of nuclear technology and industrial development. In that context, Croatia thanked the Agency for organizing a large number of educational workshops to expand knowledge and understanding of the key characteristics and applications of SMRs and microreactors, with an emphasis on security and safety. SMR development and deployment relied heavily on the global standardization and harmonization of regulatory and industrial approaches, to which the Agency's NHSI made a significant contribution.

177. Maintaining good cooperation with the Agency, Croatia was improving nuclear and radiation safety by implementing international standards and strengthening national capabilities. It continued intensive work on improving the national nuclear and radiation safety regulatory framework by implementing its international obligations and IRRS and ARTEMIS mission recommendations.

In addition, Croatian scientists and experts continuously participated in national and regional TC projects in accordance with the priorities identified in the CPF. Croatia had also participated in the Joint Eighth and Ninth Review Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the CNS in March 2023.

178. In June 2023, Croatia had received an ARTEMIS mission in order to fulfil its obligations under Article 14.3 of Council Directive 2011/70/Euratom of 19 July 2011 establishing a Community framework for the responsible and safe management of spent fuel and radioactive waste, and the team's recommendations and suggestions provided valuable guidance on improving the national system for managing radioactive waste, disused sources and spent nuclear fuel. Croatia was strongly committed to strengthening its national regulatory and legal framework in that area to reduce the future burden of disposing of radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel.

179. His country maintained highly successful bilateral cooperation with its neighbours — in particular Hungary and Slovenia — especially with regard to the timely exchange of information in the event of a nuclear or radiological threat.

180. Croatia was committed to continued close cooperation with the Agency and wished the General Conference all success.

181. Ms BAKHTARI (Afghanistan), extending warm congratulations to the Director General, said that his leadership had proven instrumental in guiding the Agency through complex and evolving international dynamics. Afghanistan looked forward to continued cooperation with the Agency under his capable leadership and to contributing to its efforts to ensure the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear energy.

182. August 2023 had marked two years since the forced takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban — an unfortunate turn of events that had plunged the nation into one of the most severe and multifaceted humanitarian, human rights, political and socioeconomic crises ever witnessed.

183. Afghanistan's previous trajectory had held the promise of strengthened cooperation with the Agency. A strong framework for collaboration had been in place, covering important areas including health, agriculture, human resources development in nuclear physics, and the establishment of a national regulatory authority. Recent events, however, had dashed those hopes as the absence of functioning governmental services left her country struggling with deep uncertainty.

184. The Taliban's consistent inability and unwillingness to fulfil its promises had prompted the international community, and notably UN human rights experts, to declare on 14 August 2023 that the notion of a 'reformed' Taliban had been proven mistaken. That undeniably demanded a revised international approach to Afghanistan for the good of its people.

185. Regrettably, the human rights situation in Afghanistan had deteriorated further, with women and girls continuing to be denied fundamental rights such as access to education, employment, justice and freedom of movement. Recent reports from various human rights organizations, in particular Human Rights Watch, had already concluded that many of the abuses against women and girls amounted to the crime against humanity of gender-based persecution. During the 54th session of the UN Human Rights Council in September 2023, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan had reiterated that the systemic, widespread, institutionalized discrimination that sought to exclude women from all facets of life necessitated an examination of the evolving phenomenon of gender apartheid. In the light of such deeply distressing findings, Afghanistan called on the international community to acknowledge the treatment of women and girls by the Taliban as a form of gender apartheid.

186. Strongly advocating for Afghan women's increased inclusion in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme, she called upon all Member States to contribute generously by funding

international fellowships specifically for Afghan women and girls. It was crucial to support them at the present critical juncture, as a new generation of women leaders nuclear science and technology must not be lost.

187. The absence of the rule of law in Afghanistan had given rise to a growing threat of international terrorism and the proliferation of narcotics. The gravely troubling security landscape in her country was marked by the expanding presence of international terrorist organizations and their disturbingly close relationship with the Taliban. The potential for those groups to engage in the illicit transport of nuclear materials through Afghanistan was deeply alarming.

188. Such illegal activities would aggravate the current situation and might endanger the lives of thousands. Afghanistan therefore sincerely requested Member States to pay careful attention to the matter. The consequences of inaction were not confined to Afghanistan alone; they extended far beyond its borders, affecting global security, stability and peace.

189. The Embassy and Permanent Mission of Afghanistan in Vienna remained steadfastly committed to the Agency's principles and goals. She called upon the international community and all Member States to stand in solidarity with Afghanistan in the current trying times so that together they could work to restore stability, protect human rights and revive cooperative endeavours with the Agency.

190. Mr DOUALÉ (Djibouti), welcoming Cabo Verde and The Gambia as new Member States and the Director General's reappointment, said that his country appreciated the tireless efforts and invaluable contribution of the Director General and Agency staff to preserving peace and nuclear security at a time of serious tension.

191. Djibouti was interested in participating in the Agency's TC programmes, especially to expand radiation therapy for cancer treatment in African countries, and had therefore decided in 2023 to join Rays of Hope to effectively combat cancer, the incidence of which had been rising sharply in recent years. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank and the Agency, planned to establish the country's first radiation therapy centre, and meetings had therefore been held during the Conference with the relevant representatives, who would conduct a mission to Djibouti in October 2023.

192. Despite its few years of membership in the Agency, his country attached great importance to the civilian use of nuclear energy for sustainable development and had fulfilled its obligations under the various NPT-related agreements and protocols. It greatly appreciated the support it had received from the Agency since joining in 2015 and had made progress in establishing an appropriate legal framework and regulatory infrastructure through legislation adopted in 2021 and the establishment of a national authority for nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological safety and security.

193. That independent body was fully empowered to take all technical measures relating to the transport of radioactive substances and the prevention and limitation of their health and environmental effects. In that respect, a decree on monitoring occupational exposure was in the process of being adopted. During 2023, the authority had held a national workshop to raise awareness of safety in all activities and facilities involving sources of ionizing radiation in the country. A regional workshop on nuclear detection architecture was also scheduled for the end of the year.

194. Capacity building in the field of nuclear science and technology was essential and would pave the way towards achieving the SDGs. Through exemplary collaboration with the Agency, Djibouti had established the Regional Research Observatory on the Environment and Climate in order to protect aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and tackle climate change. The observatory, built with Djibouti's own funds and Agency support, was an essential milestone in efforts to better understand and combat the environmental and climatic challenges facing his region.

195. Djibouti was implementing several TC projects with the Agency with a view to enhancing the effective use of nuclear applications and techniques to achieve national objectives; improving and strengthening the national chemistry laboratory's analytical capacity in food safety; and using isotopic and hydrometeorological tools to understand the impact of climate change on groundwater.

196. As the projects neared completion, Djibouti looked forward to receiving technical cooperation in the next cycle for carbon sequestration, the use of a mini irradiator to improve agricultural yields, and the strengthening of radioisotope production capacity with a view to setting up a radiotherapy centre. Recognizing the Agency's key role in disseminating skills and knowledge, Djibouti called for increased funding for the TC programme.

197. On the international level, Djibouti was deeply concerned about the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other WMDs throughout the world, in particular the Middle East. It therefore called on all countries and regions to work towards a nuclear-weapon-free world and would continue to support resolutions in that regard, in particular the draft resolution on the application of IAEA safeguards in the Middle East. In that connection, Djibouti was pleased to have signed the TPNW in January 2023.

198. In closing, he emphasized Djibouti's firm commitment to the peaceful uses of nuclear technology and expressed its support for the Agency's indispensable roles in ensuring nuclear security and compliance with non-proliferation obligations.

199. Mr CHIRÚ OCHOA (Panama) said that the Director General's re-election reflected Member States' confidence in his leadership to continue fulfilling his statutory functions and the Agency's mandate.

200. The admission of Cabo Verde and The Gambia to the Agency on the 70th anniversary of former US President Dwight Eisenhower's visionary "Atoms for Peace" speech clearly demonstrated the Agency's relevance, vitality and validity and the importance of nuclear technology and applications for global peace and development.

201. As a founding member of the United Nations, Panama firmly defended the principles and purposes of that organization, in particular the legal equality of States, territorial integrity, the non-use or threat of use of force in relations between States, and the peaceful resolution of international disputes.

202. The Agency had been founded to act in harmony with UN purposes and principles in order to promote peace and international cooperation. His country therefore expressed its strongest support for the efforts of the Director General and the Secretariat to fulfil their respective mandates in the area of nuclear non-proliferation in accordance with the Agency's Statute, the NPT and Member States' safeguards agreements and additional protocols.

203. Given that the alarming challenges to peace and international security of late and the latent risks to the nuclear safety and security of peaceful nuclear facilities posed the threat of a nuclear incident with unpredictable consequences, Panama reaffirmed its support for the Director General's efforts to maintain and intensify effective and comprehensive nuclear security measures for all nuclear and radiological material and facilities.

204. Likewise, it strongly supported the Agency's efforts to fulfil its verification and monitoring obligations and called on all parties concerned to return to the path of negotiation and consensus with a view to reducing tensions, building trust and eliciting reciprocal guarantees of mutual respect and transparency.

205. The demands of the international situation continued to throw up challenges, but the Agency still demonstrated its relevance by providing effective instruments to promote peace and international cooperation through the peaceful use of nuclear science and technology. Panama supported the Agency's

important role in that area and aligned its policies with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs, which served as a framework for its CPF.

206. Commending the Agency's efforts to fulfil its technical assistance mandate over the period 2022–2023, Panama expressed appreciation for the significant contribution made to strengthening the country's technical capacities so as to improve oncology service coverage and quality and develop key sectors of its economy. ARCAL's valuable contribution to capacity building in Panama was also recognized.

207. Despite efforts to fight cancer, the global incidence of the disease was on the rise, overwhelming many countries' ability to adequately treat patients with the required dignity and efficiency. Panama therefore commended the Director General's call to donor States to collaborate with the Agency on the praiseworthy Rays of Hope initiative. Bearing in mind the grave reality, Panama had expressed its firm support for the initiative and had requested to step up its collaboration with the Agency to strengthen national cancer control capacities.

208. Panama was grateful for the effective professional support provided by the Department of Technical Cooperation and the Department of Nuclear Sciences and Applications, in particular the Nuclear Medicine and Diagnostic Imaging Section, to develop a comprehensive action plan to design and build two new oncology facilities and train specialized staff to operate them, which would further boost the quality and coverage of public oncology services.

209. The global problem of marine plastic pollution was one the greatest contemporary challenges. As Panama straddled two oceans, it enthusiastically supported NUTEC Plastics as an initiative of both national and regional importance.

210. His country noted with concern the growing effects of climate change on weather patterns and global food security and the increased incidence and severity of natural disasters and diseases. The newly launched Atoms4Food initiative to help Member States use nuclear techniques to improve their capacities in food production, food security, agricultural planning and nutritional programming was therefore welcome.

211. Panama recognized the importance of the sovereign equality of Member States, including the legitimate right to belong to regional groups, and supported the Agency's significant efforts to achieve gender equity and increase women's participation in the nuclear field.

212. Mr BUCHEERI (Bahrain), congratulating the Director General on his reappointment, said that his country praised the Agency's commitment to strengthening international cooperation in the nuclear field in service of peace and development and appreciated its efforts to provide an international platform, in the form of the General Conference, for exchanging ideas and knowledge, broadening the peaceful applications of nuclear energy in Member States and strengthening nuclear safety and security in the face of global threats.

213. The Agency played a leading role in the provision of technical cooperation and the creation of broad networks of technical assistance to support the use of nuclear techniques to achieve the SDGs at both local and international level. Since joining the Agency in 2009, Bahrain had benefited from those activities and from the Agency's work to develop a regulatory framework for nuclear and radiation safety and security, prevent the misuse of nuclear materials and technologies through its safeguards system, and ensure the preparedness of Member States in the event of a nuclear or radiological emergency.

214. Bahrain accorded great importance to its technical cooperation with the Agency, especially in the areas of security and development. In that connection, it had very recently signed a new CPF for the period 2024–2029. Under its first CPF, Bahrain had successfully implemented projects to develop its

infrastructure for nuclear and radiological safety and security, build its national capacities in the use of nuclear techniques for environmental analysis and protection, and enhance radiation safety for patients and accompanying persons during diagnostic and interventional radiological procedures. Bahrain hoped to continue expanding its cooperation with the Agency through future TC projects to build its capacities and resources in the fields of health, the environment, water resources management, agriculture and industry. He highlighted the Agency's visit to Bahrain in May 2023, which had helped raised awareness and encourage discussion about possible future forms of technical cooperation between the Agency and Bahrain.

215. His country remained committed to implementing the international instruments to which it was party and submitting national reports as required to ensure the continuation of its cooperation with the Agency, in line with its firm policy of support for cooperation in combating the misuse of nuclear materials and technology. Bahrain encouraged all Member States to submit their own national reports and to continue cooperating with the Agency to ensure global nuclear security.

216. The capacity building opportunities provided by the Agency in the form of regular meetings and training sessions on various topics were praiseworthy, especially those related to EPR, food safety and the management of disused sealed radioactive sources.

217. Bahrain remained firmly committed to establishing a Middle East free from nuclear weapons and WMDs, in line with the resolution adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. Emphasizing that the elimination of nuclear weapons was the only way to guarantee that they would not be used, Bahrain called on all States in the region to accede to the NPT and place all their nuclear programmes and facilities under the Agency's comprehensive safeguards. The position of the leadership of Bahrain on the issue reflected the priority that it accorded to policies to combat proliferation and ensure regional and international safety, security and stability. As stated by Bahrain before the UN General Assembly, more needed to be done to prevent the spread of WMDs and ensure their elimination from the Middle East.

218. Thanking the Agency for its continued cooperation with Bahrain, he reiterated his country's desire for further fruitful and constructive cooperation with the Agency and other Member States to achieve the noble aims for which the Agency had been founded, most importantly strengthening the peaceful uses of nuclear energy across all areas of development for the benefit of all humanity.

219. Ms MICHAEL (Cyprus), congratulating the Director General on his reappointment, said that her country appreciated the Secretariat's dedication and professionalism in an extremely challenging international context and would continue cooperating to achieve the aim of using atoms for peace and development.

220. Against the backdrop of war in Ukraine, Cyprus condemned in the strongest terms any breach of international peace and security through military action by any State against the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of another State. The aggression against Ukraine — a gross violation of international law — was reminiscent of the foreign aggression against Cyprus, the consequences of which were still felt by its people. Member States had a duty to stand on the right side of history.

221. Cyprus highly valued the role of the TC programme in enhancing the responsible development of peaceful applications of nuclear technology and achieving the SDGs and had gained knowledge and expertise through various projects funded by the TCF. In addition to co-organizing a number of Agency events, it currently had two national projects under the 2020–2023 programme and intended to implement new projects in future cycles.

222. Cyprus thanked the Agency for providing experts to build its capacity for the cradle to grave management of sealed radioactive sources and equipment for the management of disused radioactive sources and for EPR.

223. With Agency support, the national regulatory body had organized international meetings on safety and security and, together with other Cypriot organizations, had participated in several Agency meetings and international exercises.

224. Although Cyprus did not operate any nuclear facilities, it recognized the importance of the Agency's standards in ensuring nuclear safety and security worldwide. As a party to all major international treaties and conventions on nuclear safety and security, her country was fully committed to their implementation.

225. Recognizing the considerable volume of work on nuclear safety and security, and given the potential for an act of war, a terrorist attack, loss of control or cyberattack with devastating transboundary consequences, Cyprus urged Member States to take all reasonable precautionary measures to ensure the safety and security of their nuclear facilities in order to protect themselves and other countries.

226. In that context, it was important for Member States to invite and facilitate Agency missions in a timely and systematic manner and fully implement the resulting recommendations and suggestions with the appropriate transparency.

227. Cyprus called on all Member States, especially its neighbours, to cooperate within the framework of their obligations under international agreements and exchange relevant critical information, making use of relevant Agency platforms and channels.

228. It strongly supported the Agency's assistance and verification efforts with respect to the release of radioactive material to the environment, ensuring the effective application of safety and security standards.

229. While maintaining its focus on nuclear safety and security, her country reiterated its backing of measures and initiatives to strengthen and improve the application of safeguards, which were indispensable for global peace and security. Trust in the Agency was essential, and Member States should do their utmost to protect that trust so that the Agency could continue to carry out its highly valuable safeguards activities unhampered.

230. Emphasizing the need to strengthen multilateralism at the present critical juncture in the international system of cooperation, Cyprus warmly welcomed Cabo Verde and The Gambia as new Member States and looked forward to working with them to address global challenges collectively.

231. It was equally important to facilitate effective participation in the Agency's work. In that regard, Cyprus fully endorsed the initiative to ensure the sovereign equality of all Member States in the Agency's decision-making processes in accordance with both the letter and spirit of the Statute.

232. Concluding, she commended the work of the Director General and Agency staff work and conveyed her country's confidence in and support for common efforts to achieve peace and development worldwide.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.