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Vivian Okeke

Representative of the Director General to the United Nations &
Director of the IAEA Liaison Office New York



International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi, allow me to congratulate you, Ambassador Massari, on your election as Chair of the First Committee.

This session of the UNGA is taking place at a pivotal moment. These are extremely challenging times. Acts of terrorism, multiple military conflicts, and the erosion of nuclear norms are all happening against a growing gap between poverty and prosperity.

The IAEA has been responding to these challenges through its unique mandate, one that spans all the way from reducing the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation - and ultimately therefore also the risk of nuclear war - to using nuclear science and technology to feed families, light cities and care for children with cancer.

Mr Chair,

The stability and effectiveness of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, having the NPT as its cornerstone, requires that IAEA safeguards be implemented effectively and across the globe.

The number of States with safeguards agreements in force remains 191, and 144 of these States have additional protocols in force. When DG Grossi took office in late 2019, 10 NPT NNWS Parties had not yet brought Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements (CSAs) into force, and now there are only 3 remaining. The Director General has called on those 3 States Parties to bring their CSAs into force without delay. In line with relevant decisions of the IAEA Board of Governors and General Conference, DG Grossi has also encouraged States without Additional Protocols (APs) to conclude and bring into force APs. DG Grossi has also called for the remaining 13 States with Small Quantities Protocols (SQPs) based on the original standard text to amend or rescind them as soon as possible.

The safeguards system is designed to provide a guarantee of peaceful uses, but the integrity and credibility of the system relies on its robustness and cooperation of States to timely address and resolve safeguards issues. In the current geopolitical context, unresolved safeguards matters have become ever more important. The IAEA continues its work aimed at resolving outstanding safeguards issues in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Syria. The IAEA is maintaining its enhanced readiness to return to DPRK when requested by the State and approved by the Board of Governors.

But challenges are coming from new quarters too. Even within some countries in good standing with their obligations under the NPT, there are now open discussions about whether or not to acquire nuclear weapons. Think for a minute about a world where instead of a few, we would have 20 or 25 countries armed with nuclear weapons. Reflecting on these developments, DG Grossi highlighted to the UN Security Council at the end of April that the global nuclear non-proliferation regime is under significant strain and that we need to protect it.

Mr Chair,

It is essential that nuclear technology is used safely and securely. The IAEA continues to support its Member States in nuclear safety by developing Safety Standards that may be used as the basis for national regulations and by providing, upon request, a variety of services, including expert review missions. In 2024, the IAEA conducted almost 60 peer review and advisory services.

The IAEA's activities in the nuclear security field have grown significantly over the past years. With considerable technical expertise, the IAEA has played a leading role as the global platform for strengthening nuclear security. To better assist member States in preparing for security challenges posed by non-state actors, in October 2023, DG Grossi inaugurated the new Nuclear Security Training and Demonstration Center, as part of IAEA laboratories complex in Seibersdorf. It is the world's first international training centre with practical, hands-on training in critical areas such as the physical protection of nuclear facilities, nuclear forensics, and cybersecurity. So far, the new Centre has held more than 70 training events with over 1000 participants.

In this context, I would be remiss if I did not mention the IAEA's tireless work in monitoring and reporting on the nuclear safety, security, and safeguards situation in Ukraine with the aim of preventing a nuclear accident. IAEA staff have been deployed as part of the continued presence at all nuclear sites in Ukraine and several deliveries of nuclear safety- and security-related equipment have been provided to Ukraine.

Mr Chair,

Cancer is an acute crisis in many developing countries. In 2022, DG Grossi launched Rays of Hope. This initiative has proven the IAEA can be a catalyst for real, substantial progress in cancer care. Through Rays of Hope, concrete actions have been taken in 40 countries: hospitals have been built, radiotherapy machines have been procured, physicists trained, and lives saved.

In a world of abundance, 700 million people should not have to go to bed hungry every night. Atoms4Food provides tailor-made solutions that boost food security, support food safety and nutrition, and reduce agriculture's strain on the environment. This joint initiative between the IAEA and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is supporting the use of irradiation to create hardier varieties of crops, better manage precious water supplies by using techniques like isotope hydrology, and fighting off pests like the fruit fly and New World Screwworm.

Microplastics are everywhere. For a source of pollution so ubiquitous, we know far too little about how microplastics travel through our ecosystems and what impact they are having. NUTEC Plastics, launched in 2020 by DG Grossi, takes a two-pronged approach to dealing with plastic pollution. One that supports 100 Member States keen to use technology like infra-red spectroscopy to monitor and characterize microplastic marine pollution, from coastal Africa to the Galapagos Islands. The second supports 52 Member States, who want to use radiation-assisted technology to upcycle plastic waste into valuable products like construction material.

In the midst of the last pandemic, DG Grossi launched Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action. ZODIAC has improved the pandemic preparedness of countries around the world. One hundred and twenty-nine (129) national laboratories have joined the ZODIAC network, and 151 Member States have designated a national coordinator. More and more potentially devastating pathogens are being characterized, and the iVetNet platform now tracks data from more than 2 400 institutions.

Mr Chair,

For decades, the world has been lamenting pollution and climate change, but for many years it was silent about one of the proven, scalable solutions – nuclear energy.

Today, nearly 40 countries are at different stages of development of nuclear energy programmes, from carrying out initial studies to constructing their first plants. More than 20 others are exploring nuclear as part of their future energy mix. The IAEA's Milestones Approach remains the gold standard when it comes to developing a new nuclear programme.

If Small and Modular Reactors (SMRs) are to be deployed globally, regulators will need to modernize, adapting their approaches to become faster without compromising safety. Our Nuclear Harmonization and Standardization Initiative, or NHSI, has been ahead of the curve, bringing together stakeholders to find ways of harmonizing approaches to regulation and design.

We also continue to support non-power applications of nuclear energy, from hydrogen production to industrial heat, and seawater desalination to marine propulsion.

Even more important to the IAEA's mission is to make sure that developing countries are not left behind. For many months Director General Grossi has been speaking to development banks and international financial institutions about how the people and governments we – and they – serve want nuclear power. Most of the countries actively considering adding nuclear to their energy mix are from the developing world, many from Africa. The IAEA is grateful that the World Bank now shares its vision, agreeing to end the limitation on supporting the financing of new nuclear power.

This year the IAEA will be present at the next UN Climate Change Conference, COP30 in Belém, Brazil, and engaging again with the G20 under South Africa's presidency.

Mr Chair,

The future is too exciting to miss. Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning are giving each of us the chance to create the future we want. But those tools require a lot of energy and the technology companies, building one data centre after another, know it.

AI and nuclear energy have a two-way relationship – nuclear can power AI data centres and AI can help improve the way nuclear operates, and so in December this year, the IAEA will bring together the nuclear sector and the technology sector for the first International Symposium on Artificial Intelligence and Nuclear Energy.

Another reason to be excited about the future is that fusion energy is now entering the next leg of its long journey. The IAEA is playing its own part in making it happen. The second World Fusion Energy Group meeting to be held in Chengdu, China, next week alongside the 30th IAEA Fusion Energy Conference, will advance work on regulatory frameworks, commercialization pathways and public engagement.

Mr Chair,

At the Secretariat, we reached parity among men and women working in the Professional and higher categories in December 2024. DG Grossi had announced the target of 2025 even before taking office as Director General in 2019, back when women made up about 30 per cent of those roles. Meanwhile, our dedicated programmes to widen the workforce of the global nuclear sector continue, including the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme and the Lise Meitner Programme.

Let me conclude by highlighting that the support of every Member State for the non-proliferation regime, the NPT and the IAEA, is crucial. We urge Member States to recommit to a system that has been one of the most important foundations for international peace, even during the tensest decades of our generation. It is indispensable now, when the world again is so deeply divided.

Thank you.