INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY
GENERAL CONFERENCE

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STATEMENT

ABACC

Mr. President:

I would like to begin by congratulating you on your election, as well as the other members of the Bureau. I am convinced that you will carry out with success the works of this conference.

This is the fourth time that the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials is invited to attend the IAEA General Conference as an observer.

Having effectively started up activities in June 1992, the ABACC has applied safeguards during these first two years, based on the Bilateral Agreement between Brazil and Argentina for the Exclusively Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy, in effect since December 1991. From June 1992 to March 1994, the ABACC devoted special attention to installations not subject to IAEA safeguards.

In March 1994, the Quadripartite Agreement among Argentina, Brazil, the IAEA and the ABACC -- covering the application of full-scope safeguards -- entered into force. Argentina and Brazil later fully adhered to the Treaty of Tlatelolco in January and May 1995, respectively. In February 1995, Argentina adhered to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Quadripartite Agreement was considered by the Council of OPANAL and the IAEA as a valid instrument of verification, as foreseen in the Treaty of Tlatelolco and NPT.

The adherence by both countries to commitments set forth in these agreements -- banning all nuclear explosive devices -- has reaffirmed the intentions of Brazil and Argentina to use nuclear energy exclusively for peaceful purposes.

The IAEA-ABACC joint inspection activities started in June 1994. The experience accumulated from this allows us to make some preliminary comments on the joint application of safeguards by the Agency and ABACC.

ABACC safeguards

The ABACC applies safeguards based on the Common System of Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (SCCC), established by Brazil and Argentina in the Bilateral Agreement. The procedures of this system take into account the additional application of safeguards by the Agency once the Quadripartite Agreement entered into force. The SCCC is in principle coherent with the IAEA system, which is a significant point for the IAEA/ABACC relationship.

The ABACC is composed of a small technical nucleus of ten professionals, including a Secretary and a Deputy Secretary, who take in turns every year to act as the Secretary of ABACC, plus two administrative professionals and six clerical staff. The technical nucleus is responsible for the administration of the system itself, which also has seventy inspectors, selected from nuclear-related institutions in Brazil and Argentina, who provide service to the ABACC Secretariat when called for.

From June 1994 to May 1995, the ABACC applied a total of 1801 inspector-days of inspection activities, 51% of which were in the field. The inventory of nuclear material present in all 70 installations in Argentina and Brazil was verified either jointly with the Agency or complementing previous verifications. This took up 48% of inspector-days in the field while the remaining 52% were applied to ad-hoc inspections and design information verifications. The initial verification of the design information covered 97% of the installations.

Special attention has been devoted to the training and qualification of ABACC inspectors. 4200 inspector-hours of training have been given to the inspectors since the ABACC started its activities. It should be noted that the team of ABACC inspectors consist of experts who are actively working in the nuclear field and/or in safeguards, which makes them very well qualified for the job. Furthermore, their training as inspectors is achieved effortlessly. The ABACC has been well supported by lecturers from the IAEA, EURATOM, the United States, France and Japan, to fulfill the objective of further training its inspectors.

Some 500 thousand U.S. dollars was absorbed by the acquisition of portable inspection equipment. Its functioning and calibration is ensured by the Secretariat of ABACC. An intercomparisson program carried out among the laboratories in the ABACC network allowed evaluation of the performance of these laboratories in both countries. It should be noted that the samples of nuclear material taken in one country are always analyzed by the other country's laboratories. The support given by countries such as the United States and France, and also by the IAEA has been significant for establishing a high degree of technical expertise in this area.

The Secretariat of ABACC has kept its nuclear accounting updated. Data assessment is made before the information is sent to the Agency. With this procedure, it has been possible to achieve around 98% accuracy in the information sent to the Agency.

Coordination with the IAEA

The objective of the application of regional safeguards, such as those applied by ABACC, is to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the system, which is aimed at assuring that nuclear energy will be used only for peaceful purposes. The ABACC system has some peculiarities which makes it different from the only other organization that applies regional safeguards jointly with the Agency, namely EURATOM. EURATOM represents member countries in their relationship with the Agency. In the case of ABACC, such representation is made through it or directly by Argentina and Brazil. Another important distinguishing feature is that the ABACC safeguards system, as mentioned before, was designed to parallel the Agency system as long as both agencies are able to reach independent conclusions.

The Quadripartite Agreement establishes two conditions that are apparently contradictory. The first is that the Agency and ABACC should be able to come to independent conclusions, while the second is that both must avoid unnecessary duplication of safeguards. They are said to be contradictory, but it seems perfectly possible that -- by applying current quality assurance techniques and auditing methods -- the Agency may reach independent conclusions using results obtained by ABACC. The challenge for experts and policy-makers of both the Agency and ABACC is to establish the principles and define the practices that will ultimately make safeguards more effective and efficient, using regional systems.

Although slower than desired, the IAEA and ABACC have made progress in applying safeguards jointly. Good coordination for the inspection program already exists and the relationship among the inspectors of ABACC and those of the Agency in the field could also be considered satisfactory. However, the procedures of sharing equipment, specially surveillance devices, lacks a solution. Some definition on this matter should be obtained in order to come to an agreement on the procedures that would be part of the first Facility Attachments that are being negotiated.

We believe that in the relationship between the IAEA and ABACC progress should be achieved in two main points. The first refers to the division of activities among the inspectors of the Agency and those of ABACC. It is obvious that in activities carried out jointly by both agencies it would be possible to preserve the independence of results. In many cases, inspection teams that usually consist of four inspectors, two from each agency, could be reduced to only two if the activities were better planned. This would represent considerable savings for both sides.

The second point is that the Agency should take into account the results of ABACC. In the sense of quality assurance, this implies not only an assessment by the Agency of the ABACC inspection and measurement results, but also of its methods and procedures. On behalf of ABACC, I would thus like to express our willingness to open up the ABACC results and methods so that top level Agency experts may verify them.

These initiatives do not jeopardize the independence of Agency results, and would be of great help in the drive to rationalize and reduce costs for both the IAEA and ABACC, also to the benefit of both countries and the safeguards system itself.

The ABACC was established for the purpose of assuring exclusively peaceful uses of nuclear energy in Brazil and Argentina. The experience built up during these years gives us confidence that the efforts made by ABACC have generated greater trust between the two countries, and also increased the confidence of the international community with regard to the peaceful will of both Argentina and Brazil. Due to the easy access, similarity of languages and reciprocal knowledge, regional safeguards increase the system's efficiency and ensure ample cooperation among the experts of the countries involved, many of whom already participate in ABACC activities. This fosters peaceful use of nuclear energy by eliminating regional suspicions, which could otherwise aggravate serious risk of nuclear proliferation on the current global scenario.

We understand that this initiative -- which has warranted attention from many countries -- could well be a pilot experience for a system that could be extended to other regions of the globe. In this sense, I would like to express to all Member States of the IAEA and organizations represented at this General Conference the desire of ABACC to share the results to date and to discuss improvements in its safeguards system.

Finally, Mr. President, I would like to reaffirm that the purpose of ABACC is to contribute to world peace by ensuring the exclusively peaceful uses of nuclear energy in its field of action, complying with the determinations expressed by the countries that established this organization.

Thank you.