

Speech of the IAEA Director General in the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of ABACC at Palacio San Martín

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Minister Timerman, Minister Patriota, Secretary General Marcuzzo, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to speak to you today.

The Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC) has proven itself to be a very successful regional framework in the nuclear field. I warmly congratulate you on your 20th anniversary.

Through the 1980 agreement between Argentina and Brazil on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, subsequent agreements accompanying the return of your countries to democracy, and finally the creation of ABACC in 1991, you opted for transparency and cooperation rather than suspicion and competition. This was an imaginative and courageous step, which required determination and vision from both governments.

That courage has been rewarded. ABACC has been a great success and the IAEA is proud to be your partner.

Your cooperation opened up huge opportunities for both nations, economically and politically, but also for the rest of Latin America. It was essential in paving the way for the entry into force of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which created a nuclear-weapon-free zone covering all 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Treaty, in turn, was an inspiration for four similar treaties in Africa, Central Asia, South-east Asia and the South Pacific. Nearly two-thirds of the countries of the world now belong to nuclear-weapon-free zones. Those visionary agreements between Brazil and Argentina have had a truly global impact.

ABACC and the IAEA have been working together to verify that nuclear material that could be used to manufacture weapons of mass destruction is used exclusively for peaceful purposes.

We hold regular meetings to review our cooperation, examine the development of

safeguards methods and techniques and discuss safeguards implementation issues. We also conduct joint training sessions, for example, on containment and surveillance systems and design information verification.

The number of nuclear installations under IAEA/ABACC safeguards in Argentina and Brazil has risen to 67, reflecting the growing importance of the nuclear activities in your countries.

Ensuring that nuclear science and technology are used exclusively for peaceful purposes is the basic pillar upon which the IAEA was established more than five decades ago. This requires hard work and a real commitment to transparency from countries, as well as from organizations such as the IAEA and ABACC.

Technology is constantly evolving and the nuclear verification regime must keep pace. We need to constantly update the way we work, the techniques we use and our approaches to verification.

I welcome the fact that Brazil and Argentina are giving thought to the strengthening of ABACC as recognised in the Declaration of San Juan, approved last year. We will be ready to assist you in this important process.

In this spirit, I would like to speak briefly today about some recent developments in the IAEA's safeguards activities. I will also say a few words about the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Global demand for energy has been rising steadily for decades. Concerns about climate change and energy security have prompted growing interest in nuclear power generation. These factors have not changed despite the accident at Fukushima Daiichi. Interest in nuclear power generation is likely to continue to grow in the coming decades. This will mean a steady increase in the number of facilities subject to IAEA safeguards.

We are therefore constantly reviewing our whole approach to safeguards, as I mentioned, seeking efficiency gains, and working to make better use of new technology. We are moving away from a traditional approach to safeguards that was narrow and focused at the facility level, to one that is more customized and focused at the State level.

Our implementation of safeguards should be flexible and driven by all the safeguards-relevant information available to us about a particular State. It is upon an evaluation of this information that we plan and implement our verification activities and draw our safeguards conclusions for each State.

The Agency now has access to much more information than when ABACC was established in 1991. The analysis and evaluation of that information at our Vienna headquarters have become just as essential to the Agency's safeguards regime as the work we conduct in the field. This also enables us to build up a more complete picture of a State's nuclear activities than was possible some years ago and, therefore, to better focus our verification activities and to draw more robust conclusions.

We are able to provide the strongest assurance that all nuclear material in a State remains in peaceful activities in the 109 States that have brought into force an Additional Protocol to their Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements. The Agency invites all countries to do so.

New types of facilities, such as geological repositories and laser enrichment facilities require new approaches. New types of nuclear reactors are also under development, for which we will need to develop dedicated techniques and equipment. It is important that the need for safeguards should be fully taken into account when new facilities are being designed.

The IAEA works hard to keep abreast of technological developments. We seek continual improvements in the reliability, precision and versatility of equipment used by our safeguards inspectors. Instruments need to be both sufficiently robust to work in the field and user-friendly for inspectors.

The same is true for containment and surveillance technologies. A next-generation remotely monitored surveillance system has been undergoing testing and new containment systems are under development. We are also pursuing mobile communication systems that will enable us to achieve near real-time information exchange between inspectors in the field and analysts at headquarters.

We have recently made significant progress in enhancing our safeguards analytical capabilities. A new Clean Laboratory has been built at our laboratories outside Vienna and

design work is underway on a new Nuclear Material Laboratory. We continue to work to expand the Network of Analytical Laboratories which assists us in our work. I am pleased to see that a laboratory in Brazil qualified for the network last year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I know that everyone involved in nuclear matters has been closely following the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan four months ago. The IAEA has been working at full stretch since the accident to assist Japan and keep all IAEA Member States fully informed.

Nuclear power will remain an important option for many countries. It provides a clean, stable source of energy which is much needed for growing countries like yours. But in the light of the Fukushima accident, it is essential that all countries with nuclear power plants do their utmost to make them as safe as possible.

With this in mind, I convened a Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety in Vienna a few weeks ago, which resulted in agreement on some important enhancements to nuclear safety. In the coming months, we will be finalizing a detailed action plan, which I am confident will increase the overall level of safety. I should note that this Ministerial Conference was chaired by the distinguished Ambassador of Brazil Antonio Guerreiro, who also skilfully steered the preparatory work that led to the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration. I am very grateful to Ambassador Guerreiro for his outstanding contribution.

Clearly, countries with well-established nuclear power programmes like Argentina and Brazil have a key role to play in ensuring that safety measures are applied in the most efficient and comprehensive manner in their existing nuclear power plants. I look forward to your full support in the preparation of the IAEA action plan and its future implementation.

The Fukushima Daiichi accident is one of the most serious and complex disasters which human beings have ever had to deal with. Nevertheless, valuable lessons will be learned which will strengthen nuclear safety everywhere. Follow-up to the accident will concern us for years to come.

The IAEA is committed to playing a central role in the process of ensuring that nuclear technology is made as safe as humanly possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by congratulating ABACC and the people and governments of Brazil and Argentina once again on their 20 years of success.

We at the IAEA look forward to deepening our constructive relationship with you in the future. By working together to implement nuclear safeguards effectively and efficiently in a constantly changing environment, we help to make the world a safer place.

Thank you.