

STATEMENT BY FINLAND

Mr. Tero Varjoranta

Director General

to the

Fukushima Conference of the  
International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. President,

Finland would like to express once again its solidarity and sympathy to the people and Government of Japan for the tragic loss of human life which has resulted from the 11 March 2011 in form of earthquake and the tsunami, and these extreme natural events causing the accident at the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant.

We hope that the support provided in form of regulatory expertise by our country in the accident mitigation has been valuable. We also feel honoured being able to provide our products to the team which clean up contaminated waters by removing radioactive items like Cesium and Strontium, and thus reducing contaminated water volumes substantially.

Mr. President,

We acknowledge that it is a choice for all nations to benefit from the peaceful use of nuclear power. However, rights come with responsibilities.

The utilization of this energy source has to be responsible and safe. The tragic accident in Fukushima underlines the need for a high level safety culture and independent regulatory body.

Energy and electricity are among the most important questions in a modern society. Finland shares the situation with Japan that the natural resources are scarce in domestic energy sources. Finland imports 70 % of its energy. That is why we are very carefully trying to have a diverse energy mix in our country. Nuclear and renewable energy are bases of energy mix in Finland today and also in the future decades.

In connection with this conference, I would like to raise issues that are of particular importance to Finland: 1. safety as the highest priority in nuclear operation, 2. responsible use of nuclear energy, including the waste management, and 3. a strong commitment to international activities to improve safety globally.

Mr. President,

In Finland, the national risk assessment to cope with the extreme natural events was launched immediately after the Fukushima accident. In parallel, Finland also participated in the EU “stress tests”. Both results show that there are no immediate safety concerns regarding the Finnish nuclear facilities. However, some safety improvements will be performed in all nuclear units, mainly focusing on ensuring the cooling of the reactor core in case of loss of electricity in the unit. Continuous safety improvement has been and will be elementary part of our nuclear activities.

Mr. President,

Post-accident remediation include two important aspects: waste management, including decommissioning of the damaged reactors and handling of the spent fuel in the pools, and environmental monitoring. I am pleased that the Director General of the IAEA, Mr. Amano, visited Finland this year. We were happy to hear that the Finnish experiences could serve as an example of a successful nuclear power programme. We are ready to continue to share our experiences with the IAEA and the Member States, particularly in the area of spent fuel and radioactive waste management, where we are at a very advanced stage. Also, our activities in the monitoring of radioactivity in the environment are advanced, and we are ready to share this knowledge with others.

In Finland, the Government defined the basis on spent fuel management already in 1983. Of course, plans have advanced after that, but the main decision is still valid: the readiness for final disposal should be reached by 2020. All waste management and decommissioning costs have to be fully covered by the nuclear power utilities.

Spent nuclear fuel is considered as radioactive waste, which, by law, has to be disposed of in the Finnish territory. The construction of an underground rock characterisation facility called “Onkalo”, which is foreseen to operate as part of the final repository of spent fuel in solid bedrock, started in July 2004. The excavation work has progressed to the final depth of the repository, more than 400 meters below the surface. The Government

expects to get the application for the construction license of the final repository of the spent fuel still this year.

Mr. President,

The international conventions and the IAEA safety standards are of primary importance. The Agency plays an ever increasing role in addressing global nuclear safety issues.

The activities to improve the Convention on Nuclear Safety are elementary, and Finland is ready to provide its experience and engagement in the open ended working group. Finland has implemented all parts of the IAEA Safety Action Plan and encourages the others to do so as well. We want to highlight the role of national R&D programmes on safety and nuclear waste management which are common activities of all national relevant stakeholders.

Mr. President,

International peer reviews are effective tools for developing nuclear safety. Both nuclear facilities and regulators should be assessed regularly. The work should aim at continuous improvements in all safety relevant aspects of nuclear energy: technical safety, operation of facilities, and regulation. In this regard, Finland has plenty of nuclear safety expertise to offer, concerning both the existing nuclear power plants and designing safety features for new units. The IAEA has performed this year two review missions in our country: the follow-up IPPAS (International Physical

Protection Advisory Service) and IRRS (Integrated Regulatory Review Service) which have been valuable experiences for us.

Mr. President,

It is essential that in countries using nuclear energy the legislation and responsibilities have to be clear. Further, the regulatory bodies need to be given authority, independence and adequate resources to fulfil their tasks. However, it needs to be underlined that the prime responsibility for safe and secure use of nuclear power lies with the operators.

It is important to note that the transparency and open communication are elementary in the use of nuclear energy. Furthermore, those issues are even more crucial in nuclear incident or accident situations.

Mr. President,

I want to express my recognition to the people and Government of Japan of all efforts and measures they have done in extremely difficult situation after the Fukushima accident.

Mr. President,

I would like to conclude my remarks by reiterating that further development of nuclear safety globally is crucial for continued and expanding use of nuclear power worldwide. We should continue to put every effort in

implementing national, regional and the IAEA Action Plan, as well as developing and implementing the review process of the Convention of Nuclear Safety in an effective and transparent way.

Thank you, Mr President.