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Fukushima Conference on Nuclear Safety

Address by

Mr. W. Steinmann
Secretary of State and Governor to the IAEA

Koriyama, 15 December 2012

Mr President,

On behalf of the government of Switzerland I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to the Japanese government for organising, in cooperation with the IAEA, this important conference on nuclear safety and to continue sharing with us information and lessons learned from the accident, as well as for extending its generous hospitality to us. I would like to express my deep sympathy with the victims and the people affected by the tragic circumstance of March 2011 and to wish the Japanese people and government every success in its enormous undertaking to alleviate the tragic consequences of the earthquake and tsunami that struck the country on 11 March 2011.

Mr President,

Ever since the earliest days of technological development, accidents have occurred from which mankind has been able to learn valuable lessons and thus make vital improvements. The Fukushima accident can be added to this long list of experiences from which lessons have to be learned. Following the explosions that severely damaged the installations at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, my government declared that it intends to make every effort to draw all possible lessons from this accident and take all necessary safety measures.

Mr President,

Following the reports concerning the occurrence of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami, Switzerland endeavoured to obtain as much information as possible in order to find out without delay exactly what occurred. At the end of March 2011, the Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate (ENSI) carried out a comprehensive re-evaluation of the ability of our nuclear power plants to withstand earthquakes, flooding and extreme meteorological conditions. It came to the conclusion that, in the event of an earthquake followed by flooding, the cooling of the core and storage pools for fuel elements was assured, and our nuclear power plants could therefore remain in operation.

However, ENSI also specified a number of requirements that had to be met before it completed its evaluation. In particular, in the area of incidents arising from extreme meteorological conditions, it stipulated that Switzerland's nuclear power plants must

demonstrate by the end of 2013 that they are adequately protected. ENSI submitted our 5 nuclear power plants to its own tests.

Following the events that occurred in Japan in March 2011, my government established a workgroup which it entrusted with the task of examining the measures for protecting the population in the event of an emergency caused by extreme occurrences. A report outlining the measures to be taken at the organisational and legislative levels was published in June this year, and the implementation of the cited measures will be the subject of a report to be published in 2014.

At the international level, our safety authority drew first lessons from the accident, either independently or in the framework of specialised fora, and in particular drew attention to the need to carry out periodical peer reviews and address safety issues in a fully transparent manner. It is firmly convinced that the safety of our nuclear facilities, as well as their operation, can only be improved through example and exchange, and by addressing our respective cultural weaknesses.

On 25 March 2011, ENSI announced its support for the call by the European Union to carry out stress tests. This decision was also supported by our government.

A few weeks later, Switzerland participated in the international campaign that was initiated within the framework of G8-G20 and aimed at enhancing nuclear safety throughout the world. It also actively participated in the deliberations that gave rise to the IAEA Action Plan for Nuclear Safety.

It has now been more than one-and-a-half years since the occurrence of the nuclear accident in Fukushima. During this time, the IAEA has undertaken various efforts aimed at strengthening the international nuclear safety regime, including the launch of its Action Plan for Nuclear Safety. The Swiss delegation welcomes the initial results of these activities of the Secretariat and urges it to pursue its efforts, in this regard we need to accelerate the implementation of the Action Plan. ENSI has drawn some important lessons from this accident, in particular regarding the following four aspects:

Firstly, the process of evaluating and examining the applicability of national and international operating experience has to be optimised on the basis of knowledge gained from the Fukushima accident. Secondly, it is important to ensure that

internationally harmonised assessment standards for nuclear safety are established at a high level of safety and according to the latest state of the art of science and technology. Thirdly, greater importance should also be attached at the international level to the recommendations resulting from international reviews and from Periodic Safety Reviews. The results of such international reviews should be made available to the public in a transparent and timely manner. Finally, further improvements are required with respect to the international exchange of information following a nuclear accident. The IAEA has a crucial role to play in this respect.

At the 2nd extraordinary meeting of the Convention on Nuclear Safety that was held last August, Switzerland proposed a number of amendments. To accommodate these, a working group was established that was entrusted with the task of strengthening the Convention. Switzerland is to actively participate in this working group and will focus on efforts aimed at strengthening the multilateral nuclear safety regime. We firmly believe that the safety of nuclear installations will be enhanced by setting examples and through exchange. At this conference, we must pursue international efforts to further enhance and strengthen nuclear safety. The events that occurred in Fukushima have taught us once again that safety is not a state; it is a process of continuous improvement. In this respect, we must not be complacent regarding what has been achieved. We have to reinforce our international efforts in order to make results in the field of the improvement of nuclear safety both operational and visible.

Mr President,

Not all our objectives within the context of the Action Plan and the outcome of the extraordinary meeting of the CNS have been achieved. We would have liked to see more binding commitments. Switzerland regards this course of action as first steps.

In the meantime, we will be pursuing the efforts initiated together with our neighbouring countries and within the Western European Nuclear Regulators Association (WENRA) with the aim of strengthening our approach to the complex concept of a safety culture.

Finally, I would like to emphasise the fact that regulatory bodies and research institutions can only be – and remain – credible if they assume their functions and

their role in an independent manner while voicing opinions which reflect the latest state of the art of science and technology, and at the same time apply the recognised principles of sound management.

Mr President,

We had hoped that, on the occasion of this conference in Fukushima, it would have been possible for an initial synthesis to be presented of the numerous analyses and reflections on the part of the various involved players. But it appears that we were in too much of a hurry! We are aware that the IAEA is currently preparing its full report on the accident, including the conclusions and lessons that have been drawn by the experts. This report is expected to be finalised in 2014. Switzerland looks forward to this report and is willing to offer its support.

Mr President,

At the political level, shortly after the accident my government suspended its examination of the three applications it had received from the Swiss electricity industry for a licence to construct new nuclear power plants.

At the same time, in light of the disaster our government called for a review of the energy scenarios that had been formulated in 2006 for the purpose of defining its strategic options.

In May 2011 it decided that the existing nuclear power plants would not be replaced after they reach the end of their operational life, that the declared climate goals would remain unchanged and that the strategy relating to Switzerland's electricity supply would therefore have to be completely revised.

Parliament backed up these decisions and at the same time called for a reorientation of the federal government's energy strategy.

This means that the Swiss government is now embarking on a new energy policy path that it considers to be more sustainable and in which the main priorities are to increase energy efficiency and promote the use of renewable energy. By increasing the degree of energy efficiency we should be able to meet our CO₂ commitments despite the fact that initially, and during a period of transition, we will have to resort to the use of gas power plants. Our new energy policy will also enable us to promote "clean" technologies, which will have a positive impact on economic growth as well as

on the environment.

Since my government is firmly convinced that electricity supply security is a matter that is becoming increasingly international in nature, it is planning to make enormous investments in the electricity network. In this way it aims to strengthen Switzerland's role as an electricity hub in the heart of Europe.

My government has also submitted a proposal to Parliament aimed at promoting energy research. Additional funding amounting to around 200 million Swiss francs could be used for creating new competence centres in the areas of energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy, while financial resources will also be freed up in the area of nuclear safety.

The new energy strategy, which encompasses the period up to 2050, is currently undergoing the political consultation process, which will be concluded at the end of January 2013. Parliament will then be debating it late in the summer. The new Energy Act, which will have to be revised and updated on the basis of "Energy Strategy 2050", could enter into force as of 2015.

Mr President, I think you will agree that my country's nuclear energy policy has been substantially modified as a result of the Fukushima accident!

The Swiss government has chosen a new and ambitious path, but we are not the only country to do so. The governments of Germany and Japan have also announced their decision to move in a similar direction and we take encouragement from this. Moreover I am proud to mention the quality of the economic and scientific relations which we recently developed with our Japanese friends, in the domains of the energy efficiency and the renewable energies.

There is still a very long way to go, but we are firmly committed to the new energy strategy.

Mr President, thank you for your kind attention.