

Seventh Session of the Committee on Environment and Development of the
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

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Bangkok, Thailand

29 November - 1 December 2022

Excellencies,

I am honoured to represent the IAEA today at the Seventh Session of the Committee on Environment and Development of ESCAP in Bangkok. The theme of the session, “Protecting our planet through regional cooperation and solidarity in Asia and the Pacific”, touches upon two important priorities for the IAEA technical cooperation programme and its Member States: promoting regional cooperation, and addressing environmental issues.

Excellencies,

For decades now, the IAEA has been enabling peaceful applications of nuclear science and technology to its Members States, through different programmes, frameworks and agreements in the Asia and the Pacific region.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the crucial role of science and technology in driving transformational change to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As small changes in our environment can have wide-ranging consequences, most of the SDGs are directly or indirectly connected to environmental issues. The IAEA is leading the way in fostering

collaboration in research and innovation in nuclear science and technology to support Member States' efforts to tackle the most urgent environmental challenges, including climate change, clean energy, and pollution of the ocean and seas.

In the energy field, clean, affordable and reliable energy is essential to achieve progress towards the attainment of all SDGs, in addressing climate change concerns, and in supporting the green and blue economies. Nuclear power has an important contribution to make as a low-carbon source of energy and, together with renewables, can play a key role in the transition to a clean energy future.

For decades, the IAEA has supported established nuclear power countries as well as countries considering or setting up their nuclear power programme. More recently, the IAEA has been supporting the global effort to accelerate the deployment of small modular reactors (SMRs) for low carbon electricity and heat generation. With output of no more than 300 MW(e) per unit, SMRs will require less upfront capital, lower financing costs, and shorter construction times. In addition, SMRs will have enhanced safety performance and could be deployed to remote regions. All these features make SMRs very interesting, especially for developing countries. However, with more than 70 SMR designs under development in 18 countries, the widespread deployment of SMRs in time to address climate change remains a tall order.

To accelerate the process, the IAEA launched the Nuclear Harmonization and Standardization Initiative (NHSI) this year to facilitate the safe and secure deployment of SMRs and other advanced nuclear technologies. Under the NHSI, the IAEA brings together decision makers from governments, regulators, designers, technology holders, operators and other international organizations. The aim is to foster greater collaboration between these actors, consistent with their national roles and responsibilities, with the objective of harmonizing and

standardizing regulatory and industrial approaches which will facilitate the global deployment of safe and secure SMRs.

Excellencies,

Nuclear energy is 25 per cent of global low-carbon power already. It has a long, proven record and enormous potential. But the magnitude of nuclear's ability to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions is not fully understood by individual countries and regions. For that, the IAEA Director General, Rafael Grossi, announced Atoms4NetZero initiative at the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP27, in Sharm El Sheikh.

Through this initiative, the IAEA will work in partnership with its Member States to model and measure the contribution of nuclear power to their net zero energy transitions. It will further help countries assess the potential of nuclear to be used beyond the grid – for example, to produce hydrogen or for desalination - whether through traditional large nuclear power plants, or through newer nuclear technologies, such as SMRs.

Excellencies,

In addition to the IAEA contributions in the energy sector, I would like to highlight another flagship initiative which seeks to find solutions to one of today's most pressing global environmental challenges: plastic pollution. The IAEA's NUclear TEChnology for Controlling Plastic Pollution (NUTEC Plastics) initiative is designed to support Member States in dealing with plastic pollution.

NUTEC Plastics supports improved recycling using radiation technology, and the study of the extent and impact of microplastics in the ocean using isotopic tracing techniques. NUTEC Plastics supports research and development projects through IAEA laboratories and IAEA collaborating centres to fine-tune the technologies

and methodologies, as well as technical cooperation projects to establish pilot plants that will demonstrate financial and technical feasibility for eventual commercial dissemination.

In addition, NUTEC Plastics provides a broad platform to discuss new and ongoing efforts by relevant stakeholders from environmental, nuclear, and industrial sectors to promote effective partnerships amongst government, the private sectors, academe and international organizations, with the goal of developing an integrated and coordinated approach to the fight against plastic pollution.

Excellencies,

One example of outstanding regional cooperation under the auspices of the IAEA is the Regional Cooperative Agreement for Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology for Asia and the Pacific – the RCA. This agreement facilitates collaboration between Asian Member States on research, development and capacity building programmes in the nuclear sphere, focusing on shared needs.

This year, the RCA celebrated its 50th anniversary. For five decades now, the RCA has consistently led collaboration in the region in the nuclear field, demonstrating the ideals and benefits of regional cooperation through innovative approaches, key policies and strategies that are tailored to evolving regional development needs and that lead to tangible socioeconomic impact.

Environmental degradation and the adverse impacts of climate change are increasingly affecting overall development in the region. Therefore, more and more projects, programmes and initiatives are being planned and implemented under the RCA to tackle environmental issues, or taking into account environmental considerations.

Excellencies,

In conclusion, as development challenges linked to environmental degradation and climate disruption evolve and become increasingly urgent, I would like to assure you that the International Atomic Energy Agency is committed to working with Member States in the Asia Pacific region and the rest of the world, to promote research and innovation, and to apply science-based solutions as well as disseminate new technologies and innovative practices through all available mechanisms. These mechanisms include regional agreements like the RCA, technical cooperation projects, flagship initiatives, etc.

In this way, the IAEA is ready to continue its support for regional initiatives that contribute to addressing the common sustainable development challenges of the region, and to play a key role in such cooperation.

Thank you.