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Sharing Regulatory Perspectives:
The International Nuclear Regulators Association

by

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen--colleagues. It is always a pleasure to meet with and learn from other senior regulators in a setting and program such as this. Today it is my particular pleasure and honor to address you as the first chairman of the recently formed International Nuclear Regulators Association (INRA), and specifically to discuss with this assembly the formation of the Association, as well as its objectives, present status, and agenda for the future.

It is no secret to any member of this assembly that safe nuclear electric generation and effective regulation of nuclear energy and reactor byproduct materials are topics that transcend national boundaries. Changes to a particular aspect of how business is conducted in one country--such as the current trend in electric power industry competition and restructuring--can have a direct impact on the world electricity market, and, by implication, on the nuclear power industry around the globe. Emergent issues related to nuclear regulation--for example, the use of risk-informed approaches, decisions about the effects of exposure to low-level radiation, and appropriate decommissioning standards command attention throughout the world. Therefore, we each must understand our own domestic issues, but, at the same time, we must work within the larger sphere of international energy demands and regulatory activities. This requires sharing knowledge to broaden international perspectives on nuclear issues, and to enhance a global nuclear safety culture.

In the Summer and Fall of 1995, soon after President Clinton appointed me as the Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, I began to develop the idea for a focused,

deliberately structured international cooperative research regulators from around the world, I was impressed by the commonality of the challenges facing national and international nuclear regulatory bodies. Two issues that seemed to be prime candidates as examples to demonstrate the benefits of this kind of cooperative effort were (1) aging phenomena at civilian nuclear reactor facilities, and (2) methods of incorporating probabilistic risk assessment insights into nuclear reactor oversight. In November of 1995, when airing these ideas with senior staff members at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I asked that they begin considering support for such an effort, and I specifically asked that they focus on two questions: (1) Are there areas in which the NRC is comparatively strong vis-a-vis programs in other countries, which the NRC could bring to the table in negotiating a cooperative international research effort? and (2) Are there areas in which the NRC is less strong in relation to programs in other countries, in which we could benefit from entering into this kind of cooperative effort? The result, of course, was a positive answer to both questions; the NRC had both strengths to offer and areas in which to benefit.

Throughout the following year, as I continued to discuss these perspectives with senior regulators from other national and international organizations, the support for a cooperative research program was certainly substantial, but an even more fundamental desire began to emerge. Increasingly, our discussions began to turn toward the need for a permanent forum specifically dedicated to sharing regulatory policy perspectives at a high level, separate from discussions occurring in other forums. In the decade since the Chernobyl nuclear power accident, the substantial increase in international high-level political attention on nuclear safety issues had been coupled with the maturing of national nuclear regulatory bodies--as well as the creation of new organizations occasioned by the breakup of the Soviet Union--each group facing challenges both common and unique in nature, and each finding its own way toward solutions. Certain bilateral and multilateral agreements and associations had been formed, each with a specific focus: for example, the Group of Seven Nuclear Safety Working Group (G-7 NSWG), focused on coordinating nuclear safety assistance to countries operating Soviet-designed nuclear power plants; or the Group of 24 Nuclear Safety Coordination mechanism, focused on tracking assistance efforts to avoid overlap and to help the recipient nations get the broadest possible help in upgrading their nuclear safety programs; or the negotiation of new international conventions having regulatory significance in the areas of safety, spent fuel and waste, and liability.

Each of these organizations demonstrated--and continues to demonstrate--the value of sharing perspectives as a comparative

tool in enhancing nuclear safety culture worldwide. The Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO) and the World Association of Nuclear Operators (WANO) organized by and for nuclear power operators, have for years provided an organized focus for improvements in safe and economical nuclear operation. Under their broader charters, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Nuclear Energy Agency (OECD/NEA) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have established programs of work addressing nuclear safety. These multiple and often overlapping nuclear safety activities have prompted a growing number of multilateral and regional regulator meetings and groups, such as the meeting today, annually convened by the IAEA for Senior Regulators; the OECD/NEA Senior Regulators Group and the Committee on Nuclear Regulatory Activities (CNRA); the IAEA-hosted VVER Owners Regulatory Group; the Asian Regulators Group, which will meet for the second time in Seoul next month; and the Ibero-Interamerican Group, which met for the first time in January 1997. The central safety role of a technically competent, independent regulatory agency with adequate resources has been repeatedly affirmed in each of these initiatives. It should be noted that early nuclear safety assistance efforts and approaches under the G-7 and G-24 umbrellas were not primarily driven or directed by national regulators, drawing on their own experiences. The other senior regulators meetings have been and are very valuable. However, on average, they are organized under the umbrella of other organizations with larger or different mandates, are topical, and do not, in general, involve policy discussions at the highest levels, yet divorced as much as possible, from political discussions. No permanent forum existed under the direction and control of national nuclear safety regulators, solely devoted to reflecting the cooperative interests of regulators or their regulatory priorities.

Finally, in the Fall of 1996, a group of senior regulators meeting in Paris reached consensus on the need for a working group to meet and to discuss the possible formulation of a free-standing, independent organization specifically derived from and focused on the needs of national nuclear regulatory bodies and their role as part of a fundamental nuclear infrastructure. I will return to this point later. The heads of eight nuclear regulatory bodies--from Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Spain, Sweden, the U.K. and the U.S.--met in Washington in January of this year, and agreed to meet again in May, in Paris, to negotiate and to constitute formally the International Nuclear Regulators Association (INRA). Emphasizing that nuclear safety must remain the responsibility of the nation states in which the technology is utilized, but believing in the value of sharing regulatory perspectives at the highest policy levels, the Association determined that its aims and objectives we would be as follows:

- To establish a forum for the most senior nuclear regulatory officials to exchange views on broad regulatory policy issues (including technical, legal, economic, and administrative issues);
- To build a global nuclear safety culture;
- To encourage the most efficient use of resources in areas of common interest;
- To work to enhance the stature of nuclear regulatory organizations worldwide;
- To seek consensus on how nuclear regulatory issues can be approached and implemented;
- To facilitate international cooperation in regulation;
- To work to advance nuclear safety through cooperation among its members, cooperation with relevant existing intergovernmental organizations (such as the IAEA, or the OECD/NEA), with other national nuclear regulatory organizations, and other groups and organizations, as appropriate; and
- To identify emerging nuclear regulatory challenges.

The Association will issue group reports and recommendations as appropriate.

To accomplish these goals, the Association has chosen to organize itself as a forum for periodic discussions, without a large bureaucracy. The Chairman is chosen annually by consensus, with the first Chairman to serve a two-year term to assist in the establishment and stabilization of the Association. To control expenses, the Chairman will provide the Secretariat function during her or his term of office, and participating heads of national regulatory organizations will cover their own expenses of participation. The designation of a single working language creates additional efficiency. Some meetings will be scheduled to take advantage of other organizations' meetings, although the Association will not convene as part of those meetings.

Within the organizations represented, the INRA membership is held by the most senior nuclear regulatory officials. The organizational membership is based on a series of criteria related to: the size and scope of the national nuclear program, the existence of a well-established, independent nuclear regulatory authority, and a commitment to the provisions of the Convention on Nuclear Safety. The initial membership will remain at eight countries for the first two years, while the members

deliberate on the most effective methods of achieving their objectives. From that experience, INRA members will consider how to involve other national nuclear regulatory organizations. This consciously evolutionary approach to expansion is intended to establish sensible foundational guidelines and objectives, while also taking the time to gain experience with their application. In this way, the Association hopes to optimize the process of organizing an international approach to harmonizing national regulatory activities, in a way that will produce a more stable, predictable, transparent international regulatory regime.

One issue of importance to the constituting INRA members is how best to develop their organization's relationship to other international nuclear bodies. As an independent, free-standing organization, the INRA intends to work with the IAEA, OECD/NEA, and the other emerging regional or reactor-specific senior regulatory groups which I alluded to earlier, to advance nuclear safety, as appropriate. This approach is intended to give the broadest possible effect to INRA discussions, recommendations and resolutions, while preventing duplication of effort, and allow the INRA to better coordinate its activities with ongoing efforts in other forums. In short, the INRA will focus on working with, not displacing, other organizations.

I now would like to discuss the INRA activities that have taken place to date, and the agenda for the near future. As I mentioned earlier, a working group meeting was held in Washington in January 1997, at which the invited senior regulatory officials agreed on the advantages of establishing such an international group. In Paris, in May, the group was officially constituted, adopting the organizational structure outlined above, and finalizing a terms-of-reference document. The group agreed to hold its first plenary meeting on January 8-9, 1998, in the United States, and thereafter to meet twice each year.

The Association spent significant time at its constituting meeting considering the issue of membership. As defined in Article 4 of the Terms of Reference, membership is based on the "size and scope of the nuclear program," with an emphasis on the operational experience gained from regulating an active, complex nuclear power program. The members reasoned that, at least for the first two years, adhering to this basic commonality of experience and interest would create optimum conditions for the Association to establish and consolidate itself, and to determine how it might usefully contribute to enhancing worldwide nuclear safety. Depending on the conclusions reached in this initial period, decisions will then be taken on how to address membership of other nuclear regulators in the Association.

The group also held a day-long round-table discussion of two issues of significant importance for both national and

international nuclear safety regulation: (1) the effect on nuclear safety of trends in electric generation, and (2) the effectiveness of nuclear regulatory and safety assistance. The broad conclusion was that the Association might gain considerable insight by a comparative review of the different regulatory approaches of its members, with a focus on how regulatory processes impact nuclear safety. Further, the Association will endeavor to identify a set of fundamental elements in nuclear safety regulation which are common to the various regulatory systems of nuclear countries. These elements would be made publicly available, as appropriate, to assist all countries in enhancing and evaluating their regulatory regimes. They also could form the basis of positing nuclear licensing and regulation as a key element of infrastructure, both necessary, and facilitating to the development of emerging nuclear programs, and undergirding nuclear commerce, while not favoring any particular technology.

The Association has also compiled a list of possible topics for future discussion and focus. These areas include: nuclear trade and its relation to safety regulation; the harmonization of safety advice and assistance; assessments of the effectiveness of assistance measures; methods of achieving regulatory effectiveness; aging concerns for reactors; safety in countries with economies in transition; methods of influencing existing regulatory bodies; public confidence and transparency; relations with other regulatory bodies; education and training exchanges; additional aspects of trends in electric generation, and their impact on nuclear safety; international conventions; emergency response and associated communications; review of activities of other bodies; and the early involvement of various other countries in the Association.

The decision to defer the general issue of membership does not preclude the group from arranging ad hoc activities with other regulatory bodies, where such activities are deemed to provide a useful way to advance the Association's objectives. To this end, it is likely that one of the semiannual meetings will seek to involve either some national regulatory or international nuclear safety agencies. As part of my duties as the first Chairman of the INRA, I have been asked by the members to ensure that relevant international bodies would be informed on a regular basis of the activities of the Association. In addition to addressing this Senior Regulators meeting, I will be making a presentation on the INRA to the December 1997 OECD/NEA Committee on Nuclear Regulatory Activities and the Committee on Safety of Nuclear Installations.

CONCLUSION

Finally, as I mentioned earlier, the key to this effort is regulatory independence, in giving a more prominent and effective voice to those of us who, on a day-to-day basis, meet the challenges of assuring the highest levels of safety in a technology which is very demanding and highly visible to our publics, but which is viewed as crucial to economic and social development in many countries.

In closing, I hope that this discussion has given you a better understanding of the goals, the structure, and the activities of the International Nuclear Regulators Association. Thank you for the invitation to speak at this session, and thank you for your attention. I will be happy to address any of your questions.