



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. S-10-011

**Opening Remarks
As Prepared
The Honorable Gregory B. Jaczko
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
at the
International Forum on Nuclear Safety Challenges
in the Flat, Mixed, and Open World
Seoul, South Korea
April 19, 2010**

Good morning. I am honored to serve as a Chairman of this very important conference. I first would like to thank the conference organizers: Dr. Byung Man Ahn of the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, and Dr. Choul-Ho Yun of the Korea Institute of Nuclear Safety. Due to their efforts, we have a tremendous opportunity over the next two days to reflect on the shared challenges we face as safety regulators in the Flat, Mixed, and Open World, and how to make progress. I would like to acknowledge the leadership of Director General Amano and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on their efforts to address many of these issues. I look forward to working with Director General Amano to enhance the strong relationship between the NRC and the IAEA. I also would like to acknowledge Dr. Gustavo Caruso of the IAEA; Dr. William Travers of the United Arab Emirates' Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation; and Mr. Ramzi Jamal of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission for serving as the Chairs of the three conference sessions. Thank you all for your attendance and for your dedication to this important endeavor.

Through international and intergovernmental organizations, multinational networks of regulators, bilateral relationships, and international conferences, we have an opportunity to work together in pursuit of our shared goals of nuclear safety and security. There is no question that these cooperative efforts among safety regulators help us all – countries that are considering nuclear power programs and countries that have existing nuclear power programs – meet our safety and security responsibilities more efficiently and effectively. They are not, however, a replacement for a strong, effective, and independent national regulator. It is incumbent on all nations to be committed to building and sustaining strong national regulators.

Every national regulator must have the legislative and regulatory authority, as well as the necessary staff, technical expertise, and financial resources, to develop standards for facilities and operators, to monitor their compliance with those requirements, and to engage in enforcement actions when necessary. This is especially true for new entrants to the field of nuclear power. It is not enough to rely on the work of other national regulatory bodies. Further, reviewing and approving a plant design is only the first step; the regulator also must oversee the safe construction, safe operation, and ultimate decommissioning of a plant. As DC Amano said, to do so effectively, the regulator must have skilled staff with adequate resources and familiarity with the regulatory requirements and technology.

Although national regulators have the primary responsibility for building their domestic regulatory capabilities, the international community can help us advance our common safety goals in many ways. One of the most valuable is through the peer review process of the Convention on Nuclear Safety. The Convention provides nuclear and non-nuclear power countries alike an invaluable opportunity to exchange detailed information, best practices, and lessons learned. At the present time, all countries with operating nuclear power plants are parties to the Convention. The numerous countries that are now contemplating adding nuclear power to their current energy mix should be encouraged to become Parties to the Convention. I look forward to the CNS review conference next year hosted by our Chinese colleagues and vice-chaired by the U.S.

It is important to remember that having all the foundations in place for effective regulation is not sufficient unless the regulator is focused and determined to vigorously advance its safety mission. I do not believe that such focus and determination can be sustained unless the regulator is independent of the industries it regulates. As I know from past discussions at similar conferences, it is neither simple nor straight-forward to try to define what independence means in specific, concrete terms. In the United States, the Congress has sought to achieve this independence by assigning the function of regulating the nuclear industry to the NRC, while the responsibility for promoting commercial nuclear power rests with the Department of Energy. Also, it reinforces that separation in functions through other organizational and procedural measures, such as fixed and staggered terms for regulators, restrictions on removal of regulators, and the way we conduct judicial review of regulatory decisions. I certainly recognize that there are other approaches that might be better suited to the governmental systems and political cultures of different nations. The important point is that all countries should strive to maintain a strict independence between the regulator and the industries that it oversees.

Much attention in recent years has focused on the prospects for new reactor construction and countries that are considering developing nuclear power programs. Those are significant developments. But I want to emphasize how critical it is that, in countries with existing reactors, the renewed interest in reactor construction does not divert our focus from the safety and security of currently operating plants and safe use of nuclear material. Even as we all have worked hard to enhance nuclear safety, I believe that the nuclear industry faces potentially significant challenges in maintaining the safety of existing reactors. These challenges are grounded in the potential complacency borne of past safety successes, and the concern that – as countries and companies channel additional attention to new reactors – operators and regulators may not maintain the same level of focus on existing reactors.

It is the responsibility of the regulators of mature nuclear power programs to maintain that safety focus on existing reactors, as well as to communicate that message to the national authorities, to the public, and ultimately to stakeholders. I can assure you that the NRC has worked diligently toward this end. One important way is the NRC's consistent promotion of a strong safety culture at the agency and with power plant operators. The NRC is working to finalize a new safety culture policy statement. Sound rules and procedures are certainly necessary to further safety, but operators also need to continually work to cultivate the type of open, collaborative organizational culture that puts safety and security before all else. It is critical that regulators take strong measures to maintain the appropriate attention to the safety of existing reactors.

I look forward to discussing these issues further in a presentation that I will provide later today on safety strategies for regulating mixed reactor generations. This is just one of many important issues we will discuss over the next two days. Again, I want to thank our gracious hosts for convening this conference and providing the opportunity for all of us to confer on the shared challenges we face as regulators. We have much work ahead of us, but I am confident that together we can meet the challenges before us during these dynamic times. Thank you.