



**STATEMENT BY THE HEAD OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN DELEGATION,
DIPUO PETERS, MINISTER OF ENERGY, TO THE IAEA MINISTERIAL
CONFERENCE ON NUCLEAR SAFETY**

20 JUNE 2011

Mr. President

The Director-General

Your Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

Mr President

I wish to congratulate you on your appointment as the Chair of this Conference.

On behalf of the Government and the people of South Africa I wish to express our deep condolences to the Government and the people of Japan for the loss experienced during the tragedy caused by the earthquake and tsunami that occurred on 11 March 2011.

One week after the earthquake and tsunami, Rescue South Africa, a non-governmental rescue and recovery organization, went to Japan to provide humanitarian assistance.

Mr President,

We appreciate the initiative to convene this IAEA Ministerial Meeting on Nuclear Safety, in response to the unfortunate accident at the Fukushima-Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The Conference is timely. We believe that the aftermath of the accident at Fukushima Daiichi should be a time for a proper reflection on nuclear safety.

Through this Conference we should declare an end to business as usual as far as nuclear safety is concerned. In the same way that Chernobyl and the Three Mile Accidents led to far reaching decisions regarding the enhancement of safety, Fukushima should also offer us that opportunity. In any case we are supposed to be continuously reviewing nuclear safety measures at all levels.

We should be cognizant that the accident in Japan has resulted in wide spread concerns about the safety of nuclear power plants. It has raised a question of whether the envisaged nuclear renaissance will ever materialize. Those of us operating nuclear power plants have a responsibility to show that we are committed to a strong safety culture. In this way we can provide assurances to the public on the continued safe use of nuclear energy.

Mr President,

A few weeks ago South Africa hosted the 2nd Regional Meeting on Energy and Nuclear Power in Africa. At this conference the need for energy to ensure the development of the African continent was uppermost in the discussions. Nuclear Power was regarded as the most feasible for supplying base-load electricity. At the same time there was emphasis on the need to take lessons from the Fukushima Daiichi accident.

At the national level my government has been carefully taking stock of the implications of the Fukushima accident in order to prepare appropriate interventions.

The South African Cabinet recently approved the country's 20 year plan for electricity generation. Renewable energy features prominently in the Integrated Resource Plan 2010; the goal is of reducing green house emissions. We expect 42% of our new generation capacity to come from renewable sources. 23% or 9600MW will come from nuclear, 15% from coal, using cleaner coal technologies as far as possible and about 6% will come from imported hydro.

Mr President,

South Africa's National Nuclear Regulator will strengthen its regulatory oversight system to ensure continuous safety of operating nuclear installations in the country. Eskom and Necsa, the operators of our nuclear power station and the materials test reactor, respectively, have been directed to perform safety reassessments. These reassessments are to identify vulnerabilities, to evaluate the safety margins for beyond design events and to identify necessary modifications. They are also to look at measures and technical features to be implemented, where needed, in order to strengthen defense-in-depth and improve safety of operating facilities.

The electricity utility, ESKOM is a founder member of WANO and has implemented guidelines issued shortly after the accident by INPO and WANO. These guidelines focus on design basis, beyond design basis and severe accidents arising from external events - predominantly addressing plant equipment, people, procedures and nuclear safety culture. The findings and mitigation plans will be reviewed by the Nuclear Regulator to ensure adequacy and implementation.

South Africa's nuclear and radiation safety regulators have recently completed a self assessment using the IAEA methodology and tools. Later this year the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station will undertake an Operational Safety Assessment Review Team (OSART) mission. These initiatives are geared to ensure high levels of nuclear safety.

Mr President,

South Africa attaches importance to nuclear safety and the role of the IAEA's safety standards and fundamentals. We reaffirm our commitment to the safety Conventions concluded under the auspices of the IAEA. We also value the Agency's efforts of promoting international cooperation and assisting Member States, particularly those interested in developing or expanding nuclear power programmes, in the field of nuclear safety.

However, the Fukushima Daiichi accident has also put focus on whether the current role and capacity of the IAEA in the case of accidents is adequate. In our view the Agency needs to be given more support in order to ensure that it can respond effectively to accidents. Amongst others, the Agency is expected to be a first responder immediately when an accident occurs. Similarly, the public worldwide expects the IAEA to provide objective information as soon as an accident has happened. Should we not therefore consider empowering the Agency with its own independent capacity for accident analysis?

Mr President,

At the same time we believe that the time to strengthen the global nuclear safety regime is now. The voluntary nature of the instruments may make it necessary to relook into a broader role for the IAEA. Member States may recall that Article XII A of the Statute the Agency authorizes the Agency to establish or adopt standards of safety for the protection of health, life and property and to provide for their application to assisted operations. Furthermore, the Agency may also, if so requested by a State or States, provide for the application of such standards to operations under bilateral or multilateral arrangements or to a State's own activities in the field of atomic energy. Article XII B and C originally provided the Agency inspectors with a responsibility of determining whether there is compliance with the undertakings regarding the observance of any health and safety measures so prescribed. We might therefore need to revisit this “safety inspection mandate” of the Agency.

I thank you