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Report of the International Atomic Energy Agency

Note by the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to circulate the text of the pre-recorded statement delivered by the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Mariano Grossi (see annex), which was played at the 23rd plenary meeting of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, held on 11 November 2020, pursuant to Assembly decision 75/506 of 13 October 2020.



Annex

Statement by the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Mariano Grossi

I am honoured to address the General Assembly for the first time since I became Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in December.

This is an unprecedented year for us all. Starting in March, the IAEA spent several months in lockdown because of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. We were able to begin a phased return to our offices, but things are still far from normal.

Many of our activities, such as training scientists, doctors and engineers in developing countries in the use of relevant nuclear technology, have been moved online. We have continued to implement safeguards throughout the world to prevent the diversion of nuclear material from peaceful activities. We also launched the largest operation in the Agency's history to help countries confront the coronavirus. Nearly 1,500 consignments of equipment for virus detection and diagnosis, as well as other supplies, have been delivered to some 125 countries.

An IAEA survey of nuclear medicine services around the world showed that the pandemic is disrupting the diagnosis and treatment of chronic conditions such as cancer and heart disease, potentially putting many lives at risk. In the 72 countries surveyed, the number of diagnostic procedures fell by more than half on average. Low-income countries are particularly at risk. The IAEA helps countries to use nuclear and radiation medicine to detect and treat cancers and manage cardiovascular diseases and other serious conditions.

While tackling COVID-19 remains a global priority, non-communicable diseases, such as cancer, continue to afflict millions, and their incidence is growing. The IAEA will continue to do everything it can so that the situation does not get worse.

The Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the United Nations, adopted by the General Assembly on 21 September, states:

“The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us in the most powerful way that we are closely interconnected and only as strong as our weakest link.”
(resolution 75/1, para. 5)

I strongly agree. That is why I have proposed a new IAEA Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action (ZODIAC) project to help the world prepare for future pandemics, which will surely come. ZODIAC will establish a global network of national diagnostic laboratories for the monitoring, surveillance, early detection and control of zoonotic diseases, which are transmitted from animals to humans.

Member States will have access to nuclear or nuclear-derived equipment, technology packages, expertise, guidance and training. Decision-makers will receive up-to-date, user-friendly information that will enable them to act quickly. We will work closely with partners such as the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Organization for Animal Health. I encourage all countries to support this important initiative.

Last year, the IAEA assisted 147 countries and territories — 35 of which were least developed countries — through our Technical Cooperation Programme. The

main focus of our work was health and nutrition, nuclear safety and security, and food and agriculture.

As far as safeguards implementation is concerned, we continued to carry out our most time-critical, in-field verification work, while rescheduling some less urgent activities, such as equipment installation and maintenance. For the first time, we chartered aircraft to enable our inspectors to reach their destinations. I am grateful for the support of Member States that made this possible. The number of countries with safeguards agreements in force stands at 184, 136 of which have brought additional protocols into force.

I report regularly to the IAEA Board of Governors on Iran's implementation of its nuclear-related commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The Agency continues to verify the non-diversion of nuclear material declared by Iran under its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and Additional Protocol. Evaluations regarding the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities for Iran continue.

In August, I went to Tehran for discussions with President Rouhani and other senior officials. We reached agreement on the resolution of some safeguards implementation issues, including access by our inspectors to two locations in Iran of interest to the Agency. Inspections have since taken place at both locations. Environmental samples taken by our inspectors are being analysed. I welcome this agreement between the Agency and Iran, which I hope will reinforce cooperation and enhance mutual trust, which is indispensable.

The Agency continues to monitor the nuclear programme of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, using open source information including satellite imagery. The country's nuclear activities remain a cause for serious concern. The continuation of the country's nuclear programme is a clear violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and is deeply regrettable.

I call upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to comply fully with its obligations under all the relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate promptly with the Agency in the full and effective implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and IAEA safeguards and to resolve all outstanding issues, especially those that have arisen during the absence of Agency inspectors from the country. The Agency is intensifying its readiness to play its essential role in verifying the country's nuclear programme.

The modernization of the IAEA nuclear applications laboratories is one of the most important and ambitious projects ever undertaken by the Agency. Thanks to the generous support of Member States, four of the eight laboratories now occupy brand new facilities near Vienna. I have proposed a final phase, comprising the construction of a new building to house the remaining three laboratories, the refurbishment of the dosimetry laboratory and the replacement of our ageing greenhouses. These are essential for our work on climate-smart agriculture, resource management and food security, to name but a few areas. I thank all Member States, especially Germany and South Africa, co-Chairs of the Informal Group of Friends of the Renovation of the Nuclear Applications Laboratories Project, for their tireless efforts to mobilize support.

My first trip outside Austria as Director General was to the December 2019 United Nations Climate Change Conference, in Madrid. I wanted to send a very clear message — that nuclear power is part of the solution to the climate crisis. I am keen to ensure that the Agency's voice on the great benefits of nuclear power is heard.

The 443 nuclear power reactors operating in 32 countries today provide about 390 gigawatts of installed capacity. They supply more than 10 per cent of the world's electricity — about one third of all low-carbon electricity. Without nuclear power, global carbon dioxide emissions would be considerably higher. There are 54 reactors under construction in 19 countries, which are expected to provide 57 gigawatts of additional capacity.

The latest annual projections show that nuclear power will continue to play a key role in the world's low-carbon energy mix, with global nuclear electrical capacity expected to nearly double by 2050 in our high-case scenario. Climate change mitigation remains a key potential driver for the use of nuclear power.

The great benefits of nuclear technologies are sustainable only if they are used safely and securely. IAEA safety standards are used voluntarily by almost all countries to protect people and the environment from the harmful effects of ionizing radiation. Member States also make extensive use of IAEA expert peer review and advisory services to help them continuously enhance nuclear safety and security.

The 2020 International Conference on Nuclear Security was held at the ministerial level in February. It was a great success, with a record participation of 54 ministers and 141 countries. A ministerial declaration reaffirmed support for the central role of the Agency in international cooperation to ensure that nuclear and other radioactive material is properly protected.

I attach great importance to increasing the proportion of women who work for the Agency. When I took up office, I set a goal of reaching gender parity in the professional and higher categories of our staff by 2025. We can already report a significant increase in the proportion of women appointed to senior positions.

But in order to encourage more women to study nuclear subjects and pursue careers in this field, I launched the IAEA Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme. It will support women studying for master's degrees in nuclear science and technology, safety, security or non-proliferation. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the programme has attracted considerable interest, and the first 100 successful candidates will be named soon.

I am committed to wisely and productively managing the resources that Member States entrust to us, and I am very conscious of the financial constraints in many countries. I count on all Member States to provide the support we need in order to serve them well.

Finally, I warmly thank Austria, our wonderfully supportive host country, for doing everything possible to facilitate our work, and I am most grateful to the Agency staff for their hard work and commitment, especially in these very challenging times.
