

NUCLEAR INFORMATION:
THE IAEA AND GLOBAL NUCLEAR COMMUNICATION

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One of the undeniable truths about nuclear energy is that it has a language all its own. Let me correct that from the IAEA's global perspective: It has at least six languages all of its own: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. In whatever mother tongue we speak, few of us have to be reminded of the confusion nuclear words can cause when they are placed out of context, or explained in a perplexing and overly qualified way. This basic truth underlies the focus of my remarks this afternoon: In many respects, *nuclear* information is essentially *unclear* information for many people in our cities, towns, and villages. As professional communicators and governmental leaders, we know that clarifying the message is often difficult work. It demands more than simply adding a symbolic editorial correction, as shown in the title to this address. We need to offer people substance, perspective, patience, and above all, an ear of our own to learn about their needs and to listen to their points of view. Only then will we stand a chance of being heard correctly.

Of course, this isn't true just in the nuclear field. Let's for a moment look at a lighthearted example from the world of the United Nations. Recently a colleague of mine -- a computer manager -- told me about a meeting he had attended. It was about information requirements, he said. "I was at the TFIAD of the ISCC, which is working on a report for the ACC's CCAQ (FB) in line with a resolution of ECOSOC." He said this rather rapidly and nonchalantly, as if he were telling me that the weather is nice outside. Only later did I learn that the TFIAD is the Task Force for Information Access and Dissemination, that the ISCC is the Information Systems Coordination Committee, that the ACC is the

Administrative Committee on Coordination, that the CCAQ (FB) is the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions, a sub-committee on Finance and Budget matters, and that ECOSOC is the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. All I could respond was, "Happy 50th Birthday, UN." I still don't know what the groups behind all the letters do exactly. As I noted earlier, clear communication takes patience, and in this case, a good bit of homework.

In the nuclear field, many of us have accumulated similar examples from our experiences. In fact, we know that the climate is ripe for miscommunication, if only because experience has influenced the public's thinking in many different and sometimes subtle ways. Some years back, the physicist and author Spencer Weart published an excellent book about nuclear energy and public communications, raising the question of why people think the way they do about nuclear energy and radiation technologies. In tracing the history of the atom's development -- in the printed word as well as through the visual world of photographs, artwork, and films -- he found a panorama of nuclear images that over time had influenced the way people think about the atom. Unfortunately, most of these images were negative, and many of them perpetuated fears of the unknown. They included the image of the mad scientist secretly working in his laboratory to test the atom's radioactive powers -- and creating a monster in the process. Or the mushroom cloud we have come to identify with the atom's destructive potential. The underlying messages: Nuclear is evil. Nuclear is dangerous. Do not fool with Mother Nature.

As the years pass, and we approach the world's 21st century, a good many of these images are falling by the wayside because they were rooted in myths, not

facts. Yet new images are being created everyday, and we need to be sensitive to them. For good or for bad, they will influence the effectiveness of what we tell people about nuclear energy, in all its forms, and how we communicate with our various audiences.

Within that introductory context, the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency -- at its core a scientific and technical organization in a highly political arena -- seems to fit right in. Not only is our mandate nuclear energy and its many applications -- which means we speak those languages -- but we have by necessity a specialized language of our own. The result can be a daunting mix of terms and abbreviations -- the safeguards implementation system, significant quantities, the non-diversion of nuclear materials, critical assemblies, the ALARA principle, neutron activation analysis, SAGSI, PRIS, ELISA, and CTBT -- that bridge the worlds we work in.

Audiences familiar with the IAEA's activities have learned much of this terminology. They include Cuba's own experienced teams of translators and interpreters who have been helping us since 1984 to produce the Spanish version of our quarterly journal, *the IAEA Bulletin*, for readers in Latin America, Spain, and other parts of the world. Millions of other people, however, still cringe at the mention of "nuclear control rod," "radioimmunoassay," and "sterile insect technique." Fortunately, today's highly technological communications environment presents new opportunities to clarify the nuclear picture. Tools and approaches are available to reach broad audiences in new ways, and to help the news media accurately inform themselves about nuclear-related issues.

I would like to look at what the IAEA is doing in some of these new areas

of public communications, and why. The work is largely geared toward providing wider access to a factual base of information and to bring a global perspective to nuclear issues for national nuclear authorities and the international news media. In short, we are trying to augment many of your own laudable efforts in useful and informative ways.

The IAEA's World Atom

Among the IAEA's latest public information initiatives is the creation of an electronic news and public information service. Called *World Atom*, the service is built around computer technology and uses the expansive electronic network known as the Internet and an information tool known as the World Wide Web. The Web is essentially a communications bridge that enables different types of textual and audio-visual information to be linked and transmitted via the Internet's computer networks. As most of you know, the Internet has acquired an image of its own, too. It is frequently described as an information superhighway because of all the places that it can take you. From our experience so far, the Internet certainly is an exciting avenue of communications, one that communicators can ill afford to ignore. Yet the superhighway is not problem-free, and its use creates new challenges. In reality, it has a good many roadblocks, lots of junk, demanding road signs, and in many instances is not a secure environment. The dual challenge for successfully navigating this highway is to make it relatively easy for people to find the information they need in a form that is understandable and of use to them, while at the same time technically protecting the information system from unauthorized access and abuse.

World Atom is still in the early stages of development, and it will shortly

come on line to be accessible over the Internet worldwide. Our overall approach and structure is being built around the idea of an electronic magazine, complete with various "cover pages", contents listings, topical sections, and sub-levels of information resources and references. Under six main sections, it will link audiences to public information resources about all aspects of the IAEA's work and offer them access to factual overviews as well as full texts of selected public documents. The type of information includes press releases, statements of the Director General, the IAEA's Annual Report, public program documents and resolutions, international conventions in the nuclear field, and status reports on safeguards inspections, nuclear safety missions, and technical cooperation projects, for example. In developing the service, we are working to demonstrate the system's capability for integrating and linking texts, graphs, photos, sound, and video on particular topics that can be quickly located and retrieved.

World Atom is part of a larger IAEA effort to improve its electronic dissemination of information via the Internet, and to integrate its scientific and technical databases covering nuclear energy's global development. Over time, people will be able to access the IAEA's publicly accessible databanks through computer links established in *World Atom*.

A Changing World

Why is the IAEA moving in this direction? For various reasons. One reason is that such systems offer a more affordable way of handling the plethora of available information, and of providing prepared material to government offices, scientific institutes, news bureaus, schools, or industry information centres in our Member States. In some cases, for example, computers can offer an

alternative to expensive mailing and printing services because people are able to retrieve and print out information at their own workplaces. Another growing application is the use of computerized mailing lists that automatically send requested information to interested recipients as it is produced and placed on line. At the same time, for some audience segments -- government officials and journalists, for instance -- the Internet is fast attracting attention as a channel to obtain valuable background information or topical news and overviews about your organization's points of view, or about events and issues 24-hours a day.

Such advantages, of course, do not spell the death of the printed word, the audio and video cassette, or the personal conversation. Rather, they expand the range of choices for delivering specific types of information in a variety of forms and combinations. At the IAEA, the Internet is an option expected to help us better balance the best use of limited financial and human resources for producing the wide range of information products in demand, and for responding to the steady flow of daily questions and requests from journalists, governmental and industry representatives, and members of the public. As many of you do in your own offices, the challenge we fundamentally face is trying to meet rising demands and expectations with frozen budgets.

In many respects, the rising expectations are tied to the new stage of nuclear development which started to take root in the late 1980s. In 1986, the Chernobyl accident elevated concerns about nuclear plant safety to global heights, in the process raising the international profile of the IAEA itself. Five years later, in 1991, the discovery of a secret nuclear weapons programme in Iraq placed the global spotlight squarely on the risks of nuclear proliferation and the Agency's

safeguards system for verifying the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. These memorable events -- coupled with the historical geo-political changes in the 1990s following the cold war -- have left their marks. Not surprisingly, these and other developments are shaping global agendas, and the work of the IAEA. In a number of cases, our Member States have supported efforts to expand or initiate programmes in areas of nuclear safety, waste management, nuclear safeguards, technical cooperation, and other areas.

While most nuclear issues historically have commanded a high level of media and public interest, the changes over the past decade have accelerated awareness of the technology's international dimensions. Nuclear issues no longer stay confined to the neighbourhood. They carry global repercussions, as events in any one country quickly can be broadcast to audiences around the world. More often than not, that puts the IAEA in the picture whether it wants to be or not.

From the public information standpoint, the IAEA's products and services -- as the initiation of *World Atom* suggests -- are necessarily adapting to the changing nuclear scene. Before concluding, let me briefly review some of these activities. They generally fall under three broad categories: media and visitor services; periodicals and information products; and public information seminars.

Media and visitor services: Services mainly are focused on responding to the growing number of requests for information, interviews, and briefings from the international press corps, researchers, and other parties, and moving to correct rumours and misleading media reports as cases warrant. To a greater extent, emphasis also is being placed on the use of visual tools, with videos and films regularly produced on selected activities. Footage is made available to television

networks and other producers for reports and documentaries on various subjects.

Periodicals and publications: A range of products are produced in English and other languages for worldwide distribution. They include the *IAEA Bulletin* quarterly journal and a regular newsletter reporting on nuclear developments and IAEA activities; an annual report of highlights targeted at general audiences; fact sheets on radiation, radioactive waste management, and other areas of IAEA activities; and brochures on various IAEA programmes and projects. In many cases, products are being used directly, or adapted, by national communicators, particularly in developing countries, to support their own programmes.

Information seminars: This public information seminar in Cuba reflects the continuing importance of face-to-face communications, especially in an increasingly computerized world. Such meetings have been organized over the past five years with the generous support of the Japanese Government. As this seminar has demonstrated, the events are serving to foster professional contacts and a broader awareness of nuclear energy developments, international cooperation, and national experiences and plans.

In years ahead, the globalization of nuclear issues promises to intensify, presenting new communications challenges and opportunities. Abiding nuclear concerns -- notably nuclear plant safety, radioactive waste disposal, and proliferation -- are certain candidates for making troublesome global headlines, whether stories arise from actual events or someone's imagination. These issues will be among those shaping the scope and direction of the IAEA's information activities. In one way or another, they also promise to influence agendas in countries around the world. Thank you for your kind attention.