



BELGIUM

Main Committee III Statement – Peaceful Uses

Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

New York, 8 August 2022

Chairperson,

Belgium aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Allow me to add a few elements from a national point of view.

The drafters of the NPT focused on energy as the main benefit from the peaceful use of the atom. But over the years, numerous other nuclear applications have emerged that play a role in areas such as agricultural development, health care, or epidemic control.

Expanding the benefits of nuclear applications throughout the world is a key objective for us. Nuclear-knowledge sharing and the transfer of nuclear technology to developing countries benefits their socio-economic development. The activities of the IAEA in the field of technical cooperation contribute to meeting energy needs, improving health, protecting the environment and much more, thus helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Belgium therefore always meets the target rate of its voluntary assessed contribution to the Technical Cooperation Fund of the IAEA. In addition, Belgium has made further extrabudgetary contributions, focusing on the renewal of the nuclear laboratories at Seibersdorf, safeguards implementation, nuclear medicine, agricultural development, and the fight against zoonotic diseases.

The Belgian Nuclear Research Center (SCK CEN) has been officially designated by the IAEA as an “International Centre on Research Reactors” (ICERR). It puts its research and other facilities at the disposal of researchers of IAEA member states for education, training and joint R&D projects.

The expansion of the benefits of nuclear applications is fostered by international cooperation. Intergovernmental agreements on civil nuclear cooperation can be a useful tool in this regard, as they provide a legal framework for peaceful nuclear cooperation between States. They contain a clear identification of partner countries’ objectives and reciprocal obligations, thus providing legal certainty and helping streamline the export control process. Belgium joined a working paper which outlines best practices for these agreements (WP27).

Chairperson,

A successful and responsible use of the atom is based on three crucial underpinnings: safety, security and safeguards. Strict adherence to international agreements, norms and guidance, such as those developed under the auspices of the IAEA, are essential for peaceful use. Without them, no nuclear program will earn, nor deserve the trust of our citizenry. The IAEA peer reviews and advisory services are a valuable tool to keep our installations up to the highest standard. Confidence in safety provisions should extend beyond our borders. Belgium and neighboring countries have introduced the concept of joint inspections in our nuclear installations. We believe this practice can improve cross-border knowledge and foster mutual trust.

Chairperson,

Russia puts Ukraine's and Europe's nuclear safety and security at grave risk. Its attacks on nuclear facilities and illegal occupation of the Zaporizhzhya power plant are contrary to the principles agreed at the IAEA and by the NPT States Parties, namely action 64 of the 2010 Action Plan. As the IAEA has stated, we are faced with the very real risk of nuclear disaster. The militarization of the plant should stop and the Ukrainian staff should be able to carry out their activities independently and without threats or pressure. The IAEA should be able to carry out a mission in the field and to help restore respect for the seven pillars of nuclear safety and security. We urge Russia to immediately withdraw all its military and unauthorized personnel from the nuclear power plant so that full and unimpeded control by Ukraine can be restored.

Belgium attaches great importance to strengthening nuclear security and continues its efforts to minimize the use of Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) for civilian applications, when technically and economically feasible. Over the past years, we have been continuously reducing our excess stocks of HEU. Our Nuclear Research Centre (SCK-CEN) is at the forefront of international efforts to develop the next generation low enriched uranium (LEU) fuel for research reactors. Our radioisotope facility, IRE, delivered its first commercial batch of radioisotopes based on low enriched uranium in 2020. SCK CEN and IRE are implementing a structural solution for the management of all the irradiated excess HEU and future irradiated LEU stemming from the production of radioactive isotopes for medical purposes at IRE by downblending and purifying to LEU in the RECUMO facility under construction at SCK CEN.

Belgium will continue its investment in nuclear technology. My country is one of the major producers of medical radioisotopes, which play a paramount role in cancer diagnosis and therapy. In 2018, the Belgian Nuclear Research Center (SCK CEN) started the construction of an innovative accelerator-driven reactor project, named MYRRHA (Multi-purpose hybrid research reactor for high-tech applications). The first phase of this research facility is expected to be operational by the end of 2026. The new lead-bismuth cooled research reactor will provide a highly performing and versatile installation to carry out material research and nuclear science research. Particular attention will be given to the transmutation of long-lived radioactive waste, as well as the production of new radioisotopes for medical purposes.