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On behalf of the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency, it is a great privilege and my pleasure to welcome you all, this morning, to the 8<sup>th</sup> Information Exchange Meeting on Actinide and Fission Products Partitioning and Transmutation. At the outset of this meeting, I have three very pleasant tasks to perform.

Firstly, on my own behalf and that of everyone present, I would like to thank our hosts, Dr. Anthony Hechanova and Dr. Kathleen Lauckner from the University of Nevada Las Vegas for welcoming us in Las Vegas and for hosting this meeting in such a magnificent university campus. Outside of the USA, it is sometimes difficult to convince people that you are going to Las Vegas for work but I am convinced that this superb campus and its surroundings will be very stimulating for all our discussions. Thank you for the great job you made for the preparation of our meeting and for your hospitality. I would also like to extend my thanks to the US Department of Energy and to its Office of Nuclear Energy, Science and Technology for their contribution to the organisation of this meeting and more broadly for their continuous and strong support to the work of the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency.

Las Vegas is joining the already well-known list of cities hosting OECD/NEA Information Exchange Meetings which form part of the broader Information Exchange Programme on Actinide and Fission Product Partitioning and Transmutation. Let me remind you of the first meeting held in Mito City (Japan) in 1990, followed by biennial meetings held at Argonne National Laboratory (USA), in Cadarache (France), back to Mito City (Japan), then Mol (Belgium), Madrid (Spain) and most recently in Jeju Island (Republic of Korea) in 2002.

Secondly, I would like to thank the members of the Scientific Committee and especially its Chair, Dr. James Laidler, from the Argonne National Laboratory. Their work was essential for the fruitfulness of this meeting. Thanks to Jim's involvement in the US programme and in most of NEA relevant activities, we were in good hands.

Thirdly, the NEA is also very pleased to have co-operated with the European Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency which are both co-sponsoring this meeting. I am particularly pleased to welcome Messrs. Ved Bhatnagar and Alexander Stanculescu who represent the European Commission and the IAEA, respectively.

As in previous OECD/NEA meetings, I would also like to acknowledge particularly the participation of non OECD countries. I have noted with great interest the increasing number of valuable contributions from these countries. We are pleased to welcome them here to enhance co-operation between all countries interested in partitioning and transmutation with a view to best serving the interest of all.

Most of you are already aware that the objective of the OECD/NEA Information Exchange Programme on Actinide and Fission Product Partitioning and Transmutation, established 15 years ago, is to enhance the value of basic research in this area by facilitating the exchange of information and discussions of programmes, experimental procedures and results. This Programme was established under the auspices of the NEA Committee for Technical and Economic Studies on Nuclear Energy Development and the Fuel Cycle (Nuclear Development Committee, NDC) and is now jointly co-ordinated with the NEA Nuclear Science Committee (NSC).

The meetings, part of this Information Exchange Programme, are intended to provide a biennial review of the state of the art of partitioning and transmutation. They are co-organised by the NEA Secretariat and major laboratories in member countries.

I have not enough time to enter into the details of the NEA activities in the P&T field and some of them will anyway be presented during this meeting. However let me focus on one point with a broader perspective.

The recent months may be looked at as a turning point in the consideration of nuclear energy as a viable option for future sustainable energy policy. It was very well emphasised at the last World Energy Congress in Sydney, last September, which first conclusion was that the world would need all sources of energy and that no energy source should be idolised or demonised. The main reasons for this nuclear comeback on the world energy agenda are well-known: increasing concerns about the security of energy supply and climate change. However, there is still a gap between a comeback on the agenda and an effective and efficient role of nuclear energy in the future world energy mix. As the Generation IV International Forum stated it, future nuclear energy systems will require better economics, increased safety and reliability, enhanced resistance to proliferation and improved physical protection, and a better management of waste. In many OECD countries, the later goal is the key issue for public acceptance.

With its potential of strongly reducing the amount and the radiotoxicity of waste ultimately disposed of, partitioning and transmutation and advanced fuel cycles offer opportunities which should be considered among future options to increase the public confidence in the safe and sustainable management of high-level radioactive waste. Today, from a NEA viewpoint, this seems very well understood: other committees than the NDC or the NSC have activities linked to P&T. For instance, the Radioactive Waste Management Committee has organised a topical session on the potential impacts of a P&T programme on the safety of a waste repository. They concluded that it would be necessary to perform comprehensive systems studies without restricting the considerations to waste inventories and heat production. Social concerns and public confidence were behind these conclusions.

In this regard, the recent changes of the mandate and name of the former NEA Working Party on scientific issues in Partitioning and Transmutation (WPPT) to the new Working Party on scientific issues of the Fuel Cycle (WPFC) should not be seen as a move away from P&T, but as the recognition that P&T is now at the heart of long-term nuclear fuel cycle policies. The list of current and future studies of this Working Party demonstrates this: lead-bismuth eutectic technology, flowsheet studies, separation criteria, fuel cycle transition scenarios, etc. Some of these studies will strongly benefit of the results of the NDC Expert Group on the *Impact of Advanced Fuel Cycle Options on Waste Management Policies* to be completed early next year.

To highlight the increasing awareness of the importance that P&T may have for future long-term nuclear policy, let me quote an excerpt from a letter sent last month by the US Secretary of Energy, Spencer Abraham, to the NEA Director General on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> meeting of the OECD/NEA Committee for Technical and Economic Studies on Nuclear Energy Development and the Fuel Cycle. After underlining that the Committee has undertaken forward-looking projects to establish consensus views of its member governments, the Secretary wrote:

“The impartiality and insights embodied in these views have been very useful to the United States Government in establishing policies regarding the civil use of nuclear energy. Technical areas where Nuclear Development Committee reports have been particularly useful to the United States include...

Sustained efforts to document the status and prospects of radionuclide partitioning and transmutation through specific studies and the Committee’s support of a longstanding series of workshops on this subject;...”

I have no better evidence of the relevance and the usefulness of our meeting.

Before concluding, I am glad to announce that the NEA received a proposal from the CEA, the French Atomic Energy Commission, to host the 9<sup>th</sup> Information Exchange Meeting. This proposal was formally approved last month by both the NSC and NDC. The 9<sup>th</sup> IEM will be held in Nîmes, in the south of France, in 2006 (end of September/beginning of October). Technical visits to the Phenix reactor, where transmutation experiments are conducted and to Atalante where partitioning studies are carried out, will be organised. Both Phenix and Atalante are on the CEA Marcoule site near Nîmes. I personally take as a clear signal of the dynamism of the P&T activities worldwide that the follow-up to this Las Vegas meeting is already decided at the outset of the meeting itself.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am looking forward to the presentations and discussions during the next three days. I wish you a fruitful and rewarding meeting and an enjoyable stay in Las Vegas. Thank you for your kind attention.