



OECD/NEA International Conference on Global Nuclear Safety Enhancement

Closing Remarks by Angel Gurría,
Secretary-General of the OECD

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Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to provide a few remarks on the crucially important issue of enhancing global nuclear safety.

Nuclear energy provides society with a secure supply of low-carbon, baseload electricity that enables our economies to function. But, of course, safety and risk must be managed properly if we are to extract its full potential for our societies, our economies and the environment. Recent experience in Japan has highlighted both of these aspects.

Sound energy policies for economic and social development

Today's economies are highly dependent on energy and electricity. We need electricity for our businesses, our schools, our hospitals and our homes. In a world in which we are constantly on the move, we also need energy everywhere we go to recharge our smartphones and tablets to stay connected.

Any critical problems in the energy sector and electricity generation can have far-reaching impacts on our daily lives, and also on our economies. This is valid for both developed and developing countries alike.

Of course, it is for each country to decide on the energy policies it wishes to adopt to support economic and social development.

Striking the right balance and finding an optimal energy mix can be challenging, especially since not every country has the same endowment of natural resources or the same geophysical profile. If natural resources are scarce and commodities are expensive to import, then choices are limited and the possibility of developing an indigenous supply of electricity becomes all the more important.

For the Japanese government it is important that all energy technologies, including nuclear power, are given due consideration when deciding which energy mix to adopt in order to ensure security of supply, preserve economic competitiveness, reduce CO2 emissions and maintain affordable electricity prices. Whatever the choice made, it will have a direct impact on the development of the economy, industry and society. And it will carry costs and benefits, and will come with its associated set of responsibilities.

Safety must come first

In the case of nuclear energy, we all need to keep in mind that safety must be the first priority, without exception. Following Fukushima, international efforts have focused on enhancing nuclear safety to enable our economies to continue enjoying the electricity that nuclear power can provide.

It is clear that where nuclear power plants are concerned, the primary responsibility for nuclear safety remains with the operators. But the role of the nuclear regulator is crucial, because of the need for an independent source of control, and also because the safety of nuclear energy has regional, national and international dimensions.

I am very pleased about our collaboration with the Nuclear Regulation Authority of Japan which has contributed significantly to this conference. Many of you are nuclear regulators or are working for a nuclear regulatory authority. I cannot stress enough how important your role is in ensuring that high levels of safety are adopted and effectively implemented by the operators and their staffs. A strong safety culture is, and will remain, absolutely fundamental to the continued operation of nuclear power plants.

We must ensure that nuclear regulatory bodies are independent, that they are technically competent, and that they are adequately resourced to fulfil their duties. These are key requisites for ensuring safety at the national level. And I can assure you that the international community is working on further strengthening national regulatory authorities,

as well as on ensuring the implementation of the “defence in depth” safety concept and, more generally, of sound safety practices globally.

In OECD countries, nuclear regulatory authorities have carried out comprehensive safety reviews of nuclear power plants. Based on the lessons learned from Fukushima, they have developed additional safety criteria to ensure that nuclear power plants are safe to operate and can withstand even extreme external shocks.

The OECD/NEA role in contributing to better policies for better lives

This leads me to my final point. The OECD Nuclear Energy Agency, and of course the OECD more broadly, will continue to focus on international co-operation and the exchange of best practices to ensure that member countries have all the knowledge, the tools and the different experiences at their disposal so that they can develop better policies, whether they relate to nuclear regulation and safety or to economic and social development.

The NEA has been very active in its work relating to nuclear safety and radiological protection, and the Agency will continue to offer its support to the Japanese government, to civil society and other stakeholders through research, analysis and initiatives across various fora.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OECD’s mission of contributing to better policies for better lives extends to a wide variety of challenges faced by OECD member and partner countries. Global nuclear safety enhancement is one of the areas in which we offer our support and international expertise. We look forward to continue collaborating with you closely to achieve these goals. Thank you!