Scientific and Technical Programme – Opening Session

Remarks by

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At the outset I would like to extend my thanks and congratulations to Director-General Amano and the International Atomic Energy Agency for arranging this conference and for inviting me to represent the United Nations.

Preventing nuclear material from being used by terrorist groups must remain one of the international community’s highest priorities.

Since the last conference in 2013, the international community has taken great strides in forestalling this nightmare scenario. Much of this success is thanks to the leadership and diligence shown by the IAEA.

However, the risks and threats have not abated. We know that since 2010, INTERPOL has reported forty-four incidents of nuclear smuggling, including for Highly Enriched Uranium.

As the Secretary-General has argued, if we are to stop this menace we need sustained political momentum at the highest level. The number of ministers present at this conference indicates many countries feel the same way. A top-down push from the ministerial level is vital.

Closing the gaps in our defences will require an inclusive approach and the active engagement of all States.

The United Nations is committed to playing its part in raising awareness of the urgency of these risks and threats at the highest level.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The risks and threats of a WMD terror attack are being exacerbated by the scientific and technological trends that are revolutionising global communications, transportation, healthcare and manufacturing. The same technologies that drive innovation and development could, if used for malicious purposes, have devastating results.

I want to outline three such challenges.

The first relates to cyber security. In an “internet of things”, actions in cyber space will have physical global consequences. Facilities housing nuclear materials are becoming reliant on digital and automated industrial control systems. This leaves them vulnerable to hacking for
theft or, in the worst case scenario, the dangerous and uncontrolled release of ionizing radiation.

Second, 3D printing and intangible technology transfers through the internet will make acquisition of nuclear materials and technology designs easier and cheaper. 3D printing facilitates the evasion of export controls. This is a dangerous prospect when we consider that some machines have the ability to print material such as maraging steel for centrifuges. Likewise, the proliferation via the internet of so-called “turnkey” 3D design files that require little know-how cannot be stopped at borders.

Third, unmanned vehicles, aerial or ground, provide readily available delivery vehicles for attacks, including from distances and against hardened targets. As this technology becomes increasingly automated, so too will the sophistication of these attacks. At the least, terrorists didn’t have to deploy suicide bombers and it will make tracing almost impossible.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

We cannot allow ourselves to lag behind the technological curve. There is a normative gap in addressing these potential weapons. The international community needs to work together to develop the required norms and instruments, and encourage responsible behaviour, especially in cyberspace.

Much good work has been achieved through the UN’s two primary instruments for preventing terrorists from acquiring nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction: UN Security Council resolution 1540 and the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, or “ICSANT”.

Since the last International Conference on Nuclear Security in 2013, significant advances have been made.

Resolution 1540 is now a tent pole of the international security architecture at all levels – national, regional and multilateral. Its impact is felt across all sectors: governments, the private sector, academia and civil society.

Since 2013, initial reporting to resolution 1540 has risen to 91 per cent of all Member States. Since 2013, 87 outreach activities have been held. These have been directed at national officials, international and regional organization, as well as civil society and industry.

Training for points of contact has taken place in Russia, China and Chile. The industry-focused Wiesbaden process held its first ever regional event in the Republic of Korea. A regional assistance conference co-organised with the African Union in Ethiopia brought together, for the first time, those States requesting assistance with prospective assistance providers.
Likewise, during the same period, ICSANT has also grown in support – from 86 State parties in 2013 to 107 today.

But much work remains to be done.

Both resolution 1540 and ICSANT must be universally and fully implemented through robust domestic legislation and capability.

The UN and Member States must cooperate for the universalisation of these two instruments.

Two good examples of such partnership are the UN Group of Friends of Security Council Resolution 1540, led by Spain, and the UN Group of Friends on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear Risk Mitigation and Security Governance, led by Georgia, Morocco and the Philippines. These groups work hand in hand with the UN system to better integrate prevention of CBRN risks and threats into national policy and to enhance coordination.

ICSANT has a solid membership base, but it is not on the same level as other WMD instruments. Some States may simply lack the capability – if not the will – to accede to the Convention. A state-led universalisation drive coupled with capacity-building outreach could help overcome this deficit.

Disparity is growing between the needs of resolution 1540 implementation and financing. Needs are growing fast while financing remains stagnant, so the gap is widening. There is a need for Member States to step into this breach.

A Comprehensive Review of resolution 1540 is due to be completed later this month under the leadership of the Spanish Presidency of the United Nations Security Council. It is my genuine hope that States use the opportunity presented by the Review to ensure resolution 1540 remains fit for purpose.

Soon you will hear more from Ambassador Marchesi.

We need to treat WMD risks and threats holistically. Lessons learned in one area can be emulated in another.

The IAEA has learned valuable lessons through its own emergency management work and partnership with other UN agencies, including through the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force. These lessons could be beneficial in developing response mechanisms for biological incidents.

Unlike nuclear and radiological risks and threats, there is no institutionalised response mechanism for biological incidents. This is a very serious gap in the international architecture. Imagine how devastating a virus deliberately released to cause infection could be.
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Before closing, I would like to remind this eminent group that the eventual way to totally eliminate the risks and threats posed by WMD is to eliminate the weapons themselves. I hope that all States will come together through inclusive engagement to work collaboratively towards this shared goal.

As Secretary-General Ban said, “Together, let us continue until we reach our destination: a world free of nuclear weapons, a world free of all weapons of mass destruction or massive disruption, and a world that is safer, more secure and better for all the people.”

I thank you so much.