STATEMENT BY

THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

ON SAFETY AND SECURITY FOR PEACEFUL NUCLEAR PROGRAMMES

(NEW YORK, MAY 2004)

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)
Mr. Chairperson,

Thank you for giving me the floor.

During the course of the past year, South Africa has continued to strongly support programmes and efforts related to the safety and security of peaceful nuclear programmes, including the need for nuclear transport and waste safety. In this regard, we welcome the progress made in the continuous improvement of IAEA safety standards and their application, including the preparation of various guidance documents and the ongoing provision of training and technical assistance.

My country will continue its active participation in the Agency’s Safety Standards Programme, which includes membership of each of the Agency’s Safety Committees. We believe that the Agency’s initiatives provide ideal mechanisms to enhance and evaluate the use of IAEA safety standards (documentation, particular) by Member States that are presently developing their nuclear and radiation safety infrastructure.

To further enhance and promote nuclear safety internationally, South Africa supports the Agency’s initiatives for the development of an international safety enhancement program for research reactors and other nuclear installations and also supports the good work being done by the Agency in the area of radiation safety. The transportation of radioactive materials is yet another important issue intrinsically linked to the entire culture of safety, and my delegation would urge that more work should be done to minimise inherent dangers that may occur.

Mr. Chairperson,

With regard to nuclear installation safety, South Africa strongly supports the Convention on Nuclear Safety. To demonstrate this support, South Africa, as a Party to the Convention, presented its National Report at the Second Review Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention. This report was compiled taking into account the general observations and conclusions made in the Report of the First Review Meeting of the Contracting Parties and other relevant changes in the management of nuclear safety in South Africa.

My delegation also wishes to report that good progress is being made regarding the development of the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR). The environmental impact assessments (EIAs) were completed in 2002 for both the Demonstration Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR) nuclear power plant and its proposed fuel manufacturing facility, and the final environmental impact reports were submitted by the independent EIA Consultants to the Government for consideration. In June 2003, the Government issued a positive record of decision with conditions. Some of the key factors in the record of decision included that the PBMR had no significant detrimental impact on the
environment and that no fatal flaws were identified. The next phase of the PBMR project is subject to the required funding being secured. In this regard, local and international partners have been approached, to secure full funding of the demonstration plant. The programme has the potential to generate new programmes in nuclear safety, education, construction and research and is of substantial significance to the African continent.

Mr Chairperson,

South Africa has continued its endeavours to seek innovative solutions to the problem of radioactive waste management, as well as striking a balance between safety and socioeconomic factors, particularly with respect to long-lived radioactive waste. My delegation appreciates the continued support of the IAEA for the project aimed at the development and demonstration of technology to utilize boreholes as a disposal option for depicted sealed radioactive sources. I am pleased to report that good progress has been made with the project, which we hope will assist particularly developing countries to prevent accidents involving radioactive sources. Following the Agency’s international peer review of this concept developed by the Nuclear Energy Corporation of South Africa, it is envisaged that the project will culminate in a field demonstration during this year.

South Africa has also continued its efforts to find lasting solutions to the implementation of regulatory control over naturally occurring radioactive material. Due to its large mining and minerals industry and its dependence on international trade in minerals, my country is in a position to provide assistance in the application of the International Basic Safety Standards to naturally occurring radioactive materials.

South Africa also published in October 2003 a draft Radioactive Waste Management Policy and Strategy. Consultations with the public are continuing and the closing date for public input was 30 April 2004. The policy defines a framework for long-term management of Radioactive Waste, including Spent Nuclear Fuel.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa supports programmes and efforts related to both the safety, as well as the security of peaceful nuclear programmes. On the question of international multilateral efforts aimed at ensuring the safety and security of peaceful nuclear programmes, we are pleased to inform that South Africa is at an advanced stage of the domestic legal process required to ensure ratification of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material in the very near future.

Mr Chairperson,

In another context my delegation has already expressed South Africa’s belief that the continued possession of nuclear weapons or the retention of the nuclear weapons option by some States greatly increases the risk of these weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. We likewise remain concerned over the possibility that peaceful nuclear installations would
in future become the target of terrorist attacks. To this end, South Africa supports the endeavours of the international community aimed at preventing such terrible acts from occurring.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson.