

**September 29, 1977**

**One Hundred and Ninety-Eighth Plenary Meeting of  
the Twenty First International Atomic Energy  
Agency General Conference in Vienna (Statement by  
South African Rep. to the IAEA von Schirnding)**

**Citation:**

"One Hundred and Ninety-Eighth Plenary Meeting of the Twenty First International Atomic Energy Agency General Conference in Vienna (Statement by South African Rep. to the IAEA von Schirnding)", September 29, 1977, Wilson Center Digital Archive, IAEA Archives, 1977 General Conference Records, GC(XXI)/OR.198. Obtained and contributed by Jo-Anie van Wyk and Elisabeth Roehrlich.

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**Summary:**

Record of the 198th Plenary Meeting of the 21st International Atomic Energy Agency General Conference held in Vienna, including a statement by South African Representative to the IAEA, von Schirnding. Von Schirnding discusses the Agency's achievements and failutres over its twenty years of existence. He also discusses South Africa's own nuclear energy program, stating that the country does not intend to develop nuclear weapons.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan



International Atomic Energy Agency

# GENERAL CONFERENCE

GC(XXI)/OR.198  
May 1978\*GENERAL Distr.  
ENGLISH

## TWENTY-FIRST REGULAR SESSION: 26—30 SEPTEMBER 1977

RECORD OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND NINETY-EIGHTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Neue Hofburg, Vienna, on Thursday, 29 September 1977, at 3.15 p. m.

President: Mr. ETEMAD (Iran)

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\* A provisional version of this document was issued on 4 October 1977,

\*\* GC(XXI)/591.

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**THE RECORD****GENERAL DEBATE AND ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1976 (GC(XXI)/580) (continued)**

1. Mr. RODRIGUEZ PALACIOS (Ecuador), after congratulating the Director General and the Secretariat on the spirit of co-operation they had shown in plans and activities carried out jointly by his country and the Agency, which in its 20 years of existence had contributed effectively to the peaceful development of nuclear energy, said that the Ecuadorian authorities were conscious of the need to promote the atomic energy factor as an indispensable element in the socio-economic development of the people of Ecuador.

2. That consideration had been reflected in various measures adopted by the Government designed to strengthen the Ecuadorian Atomic Energy Commission, which had a constitution, which was financed from the general budget of the State and which had experienced staff to implement short-, medium- and long-term programmes.

3. Since he had become President of the Ecuadorian Atomic Energy Commission, efforts had been made to fulfil the country's obligations vis-à-vis the Agency so that the technical assistance coming from that source flowed smoothly in the national institutions that had requested it. Co-operation offered to radio-therapy centres had been started through treatment schedules and radiological protection measures which the Commission's staff had introduced, as emphasis had to be put on the drawing-up of radiological safety regulations which, when revised by officials of institutions involved in that field, would be submitted to the Government for promulgation.

4. The impetus given to the Commission in the last 20 months had already gained it national recognition as an institution which had provided itself with a basic structure and which could direct itself positively in future to accomplishing its special tasks. In that context, it had co-operated with various Ecuadorian institutions, concentrating its activities on the preparation of a new law on mining - with the Ministry of Natural and Energy Resources - and on the setting up of a centre for integrated sampling of renewable and non-renewable natural resources by remote sensor.

5. The technical assistance requested by Ecuador from the Agency for 1978 would be intended, in particular, for institutions in Ecuador's main port, Guayaquil, and would serve to encourage the development of nuclear sciences, especially at the educational level, and of certain technical projects considered to be of high priority.

6. At the last meeting of the Inter-American Nuclear Energy Commission held in Lima, a distinguished Ecuadorian scientist had been appointed a member of that body's Advisory

Committee, which, it was hoped, would be able, with the Agency's support, to prepare specific programmes which would benefit the countries of Latin America.

7. During 1977, technical and economic co-operation agreements had been signed with Argentina and Spain, under which appropriate action was being taken so that Ecuador would have suitable facilities available within the next five years in which the peaceful atom could be used for the benefit of Ecuador and its people. The Commission was grateful for the co-operation of those countries and for the hospitality it was going to be offered by the Spanish Nuclear Energy Board during a visit officials were to make to Spanish facilities.

8. His Government recognized the importance of the Agency's safeguards programmes, but it thought that they should be kept at appropriate levels so that the technical assistance programmes so urgently needed by the less-developed countries in such fields as health, agriculture and nutrition, which would raise the standard of living of their inhabitants, would not suffer.

9. It also suggested that the existing unused balances in the Agency's budget which had been frozen for several years should be used for selected programmes of direct benefit to countries that were starting their activities in the field of nuclear energy. That could result in more funds being available for assistance in the preparation of medium- and long-term programmes and for increasing training of human resources in the many different aspects of scientific research.

10. Mr. VON SCHIRNDING (South Africa) said that it was appropriate on the twentieth anniversary of IAEA that the Conference should reflect on the extent to which the Agency had fulfilled the objectives set forth in its Statute: "... to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world".

11. Evidence of the Agency's achievements in promoting those goals was to be found in its technical assistance programme under which countries less advanced in the field of atomic energy were assisted to develop their own peaceful nuclear capabilities for the benefit of all their peoples. Through such Agency projects as the International Food Irradiation Project, better utilization of the world's agricultural resources was promoted and the safeguards system developed under the auspices of and administered by the Agency provided a strong deterrent to the possible diversion of nuclear material to non-peaceful purposes.

12. The numerous technical meetings organized by the Agency provided an opportunity for the world's nuclear scientists and experts to exchange their ideas freely on various aspects of nuclear science and undoubtedly fostered a spirit of international co-operation in that respect.

13. After paying tribute to the Director General and staff of the Agency, he said that when his Government had been invited in 1954 by the Government of the United States of America to participate in the drafting of the Statute of the Agency, it had responded with enthusiasm. It had done so not because of any direct benefit South Africa could derive from the Agency but rather, as one of the world's major uranium producers, because it wished to make a contribution to the objectives for which the Agency had been envisaged.

14. South Africa had identified itself closely with those objectives and ideals, as was demonstrated by the contribution it had made to the establishment of the Agency's safeguards system, by the tangible support it had given to the technical assistance programme and through its ongoing active participation in various Agency projects including the International Food Irradiation Project. Furthermore, South Africa's scientists, who had regularly attended Agency-sponsored meetings, had contributed constructively to the furtherance of knowledge on nuclear science.

15. South Africa's own nuclear energy programme bore witness to its stated policy of peaceful uses of the atom. It had been in pursuance of that policy that South Africa, a major producer of uranium, had undertaken to supply its uranium to non-nuclear-weapon States only under Agency or equivalent safeguards.

16. The 20-MW research reactor, SAFARI I at Pelindaba, which was fuelled under a Co-operation Agreement with the United States of America, was subject to IAEA safeguards, as was the 2000-MW nuclear power station at present being constructed at Koeberg in the Western Cape Province. It was well known that the SAFARI research reactor was used solely for peaceful scientific research and for the production of radioisotopes for medical diagnostic and therapeutic application in all sections of the South African population and, upon request, in neighbouring African countries. It was also employed in research and development related to the preservation of agricultural products by sterilization.

17. The announcement in 1970 that South Africa had developed its own uranium enrichment process had been accompanied by an expression of willingness to place the proposed commercial enrichment plant under Agency safeguards. Steps towards that end had already been initiated by the South African Atomic Energy Board in conjunction with the IAEA.

18. Notwithstanding repeated assurances about its commitment to peaceful uses of the atom and despite regular inspections by the IAEA inspectors of the South African research reactor SAFARI I at Pelindaba to the full satisfaction of the Agency, tendentious allegations had been made, with tiresome frequency, that South Africa had either developed or was developing a nuclear weapon. It had always been possible, however, to trace such allegations to highly suspect sources seeking political advantage.

19. Such had been the recent patently spurious allegation by the Soviet Union that South Africa was about to explode an atomic device - an allegation made with the utmost cynicism at a time when the Soviet Union itself was engaged in such activities!

20. Once again the South African Government had given assurances that it did not have or intend to develop a nuclear explosive device for any purpose, peaceful or otherwise; that it had no testing facility for nuclear explosives and that there would not be any nuclear explosive testing of any kind in South Africa. But South Africa knew from experience that such allegations would again be made by those who preyed on the fears of mankind.

21. In reflecting on the Agency's achievements, he felt bound to draw attention to those aspects where the Agency had failed to come up to expectations.

22. An important statutory function of the Agency was to promote and further the establishment of safeguarded world-wide disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament. The lack of progress in that field gave greater cause for concern today than twenty years previously. After twenty years the nuclear armaments race was as active as when the Agency started out on its venture. Tens of thousands of scientists, technicians and workers were reportedly engaged in the production of nuclear weapons and in the development and design of new nuclear weapons. Only recently there had been reports of one such new weapon of destruction which was said to have the curious merit of destroying people while leaving buildings intact; anything further removed from the high principles which had given birth to the Agency was hard to imagine.

23. There had been other developments which had cast a cloud on international efforts to achieve the Agency's objective of non-proliferation and its objective of accelerating and enlarging the contribution of atomic energy to the advantage of mankind.

24. At the recent international conference in Iran on the transfer of nuclear technology, a number of countries, among them parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)[1], had expressed their disillusionment and frustration at the limitations and restrictions being imposed on their peaceful development of nuclear energy. Many of them considered that those measures, instead of contributing towards the control of nuclear weapons proliferation as intended, would have the exact opposite effect. The South African Government too thought that a genuine commitment to non-proliferation was least served by actions which cast doubt on the reliability of a supplier of material essential to demonstrably peaceful nuclear programmes. It must surely be obvious that the failure of a supplier to live up to solemn

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[1] Reproduced in document INF/CIRC/140.

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treaty commitments in that field was one of the root causes for the decision by countries to have their own facilities so as to be self-reliant. Unilateral action of that kind by certain supplier nations would not only harm the credibility of NPT but would also undermine the Agency's safeguards system.

25. Another development with deeply disturbing implications flowed from the recent failure by the Board of Governors to implement the explicit requirements of Article VI, A, 1 of the Statute. In rejecting the designation of South Africa as the Member in the African area "most advanced in the technology of atomic energy including the production of source materials", the Board had acted illegally and in violation of the Agency's Statute. No suggestion had been advanced that South Africa did not qualify in terms of the requirements of Article VI, A, 1. Indeed, no such suggestion could possibly be made in the face of the overwhelming evidence that South Africa had, since the founding of the Agency, been, and continued to be, the African country most advanced in the technology of atomic energy, including the production of source materials. Reliance had thus been placed on arguments of a purely political nature which were wholly irrelevant.

26. In failing to designate South Africa, the Board had, however, done more than violate the provisions of the Statute; the Agency itself had been done an irreparable injury, for its integrity and its credibility had now been placed in doubt. That was a tragic development for the Agency, which had been assigned, amongst other tasks, an important role in the fields of safeguards and non-proliferation. Its ability to discharge those important tasks under the Statute, as well as under NPT, would inevitably be impaired.

27. Countries which had a sincere commitment to the objectives of the Agency could not be sanguine about that development and were bound to take it into account in the determination of their policies in the atomic energy field. Those disquieting and disturbing developments would have to be faced soberly by the international community if it was to rescue the highly promising venture on which it had embarked twenty years before.

28. Mr. VALDES-MARTINEZ (Chile), after congratulating the President on his election, said that he wished succinctly to describe the work the Chilean Nuclear Energy Commission had accomplished during the year past. The project for the construction of Chile's first nuclear power station was continuing to make progress, particularly in respect of training of staff for the various phases of the work, and Agency fellowships had helped a great deal in that connection. The research reactor of the Lo Aguirre Nuclear Centre had, he was pleased to announce, gone critical on 4 February; ancillary construction was now going forward with a view to bringing the installation up to full power (20 MW). Spain had provided valuable technical assistance in connection with that project, for which he wished to express sincere thanks.

29. In December Chile expected to put a multi-purpose pilot irradiation plant into operation, also at the Lo Aguirre Nuclear Centre.

30. The reactor of the La Reina Centre had continued operating normally at full power, 20 to 30 hours a week for the production of radioisotopes, special research and training. At present the isotopes produced by that reactor were able to cover virtually all the country's increasing demand, and some radioisotopes had been exported to Bolivia and Argentina.

31. The projects already in hand in connection with the nuclear raw materials programme had been completed to the extent of about 50%; in particular, 24 000 km<sup>2</sup> of Chile's territory had been explored. In December 1976 international tenders had been invited in connection with the raw materials programme, and the offers received were at present being evaluated. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was making an important contribution, through the Agency, in the form of experts, equipment and fellowships.

32. As far as the applications of nuclear science to public health were concerned, two pilot centres for radiotherapy and nuclear medicine had been set up by the Commission under the agreement in force with the National Health Service, and those had brought about a significant improvement in the quality of the services offered to Chileans in that special medical field.

33. Through its "training and advanced instruction" programme the Commission had, between September 1976 and August 1977, offered various courses for the benefit of its staff, some of which had been attended by scientists from other institutions as well.

34. In an effort to secure even closer collaboration with other countries, Chile had concluded certain additional agreements with Argentina, viz. a project for co-operation in the use of isotopes in hydrology, a project for co-operation in the applications of atomic energy in industry, and a co-operative radioisotope project.

35. The Third Chilean Seminar on Biology and Nuclear Medicine had been organized and conducted with notable success, both as regards the number of participants and the excellent results obtained.

36. Chile's new legal norms to govern radiation safety were at the stage of codification and final editing, within the context of a Nuclear Law soon to be submitted for governmental approval and subsequent promulgation.

37. A subject that deserved special mention, in the annual report submitted by the Board (GC(XXI)/580), was the success of the Conference on Nuclear Power and its Fuel Cycle (the Salzburg