

RCA Meeting

Opening Remarks on behalf Mr. W. Burkart

Deputy Director General,

Department of Nuclear Sciences and Applications

Wednesday, 18 September 2002, Room C 07 V, 09.00

Distinguished Chairman, Delegates

[On behalf of Mr. Burkart] I thank you for this opportunity on the occasion of the 46th General Conference to address this meeting of RCA. This can be regarded as a special time in the world for reflecting on the needs of developing nations, and assisting in meeting their priority needs, following so soon after the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Our Secretary General, Kofi Annan, used the acronym WEHAB, standing for Water, Energy, Health, Agriculture and Bio-diversity, in the context of the WSSD, and, as I am sure that delegates here will know, solutions to the WEHAB issues are some of the most urgent that are facing the global community. Our programmes in Food and Agriculture, Human Health, Water Resources, Marine and Terrestrial Environment, and in Physical and Chemical Sciences are matched very well to the WEHAB issues, and will guide our strategy and programmes in the future years.

I believe that together we are making progress, as shown by some of the project results under the TC programme. For example, 200 professionals from 68 medical institutions from 17 participating countries have been trained in nuclear cardiology. Liver cancer, which is most highly prevalent in the region of Asia, is being tackled with a new, cost-effective radionuclide procedure and physicians from several RCA countries have already been trained in the new procedures.

Coastal zone management is also an issue of great concern to many world regions, and this of course is of concern to your region. About 40% of the world's population live within 100 kilometres of the coast, with the many attendant problems of water, health, nutrition and environment. Harmful Algal Blooms, which affect both health and food sources have been rapidly analysed with isotopic techniques. We were able to assist in Indonesia, where HABs killed over 100 people and severely damaged the local fishing industries. The experience from RCA countries with these techniques has now been extended also to African countries.

There are many examples from the programme; I have mentioned just two to indicate the diversity of techniques available. It has been our aim in the Agency's contribution to the World Summit to make the decision makers aware of what can be achieved with the technologies at our disposal. As the DDG-NA attended Johannesburg as head of the Agency's delegation, he would like to share some perceptions with you today of the Summit.

It was a huge event, with an estimated 50 ~ 60,000 people converging on Johannesburg. Summit events were held in 4 places. The Sandton Convention Centre hosted the Plenary sessions, negotiations and Consultations; Ubuntu village hosted civil society organisations, ICSU and Science stands, country and commercial company stands, and also was a market for local goods. NESRAG hosted the NGOs and the Water Dome hosted the stands of the UN organisations, national and regional projects and was an additional conference centre.

Logistics for the Summit were excellent. South Africa did everything to make it a success. Security, of course, was paramount. Marches were held without clashes, a credit to South Africa, the organisation and the participants.

The Summit has been widely reported in the media, and there are differing views as to its success or otherwise. My perception is that it is like water in a glass - it can be seen negatively as half empty, or positively as half full, for the WEHAB components.

The water issue received special consideration. Numerical goals were agreed for input (safe water), and also for output (sanitation). The vision is to half the world population without access by 2015.

For agriculture, the Summit was positive for the protection and restoration of fisheries, but the burning question of subsidies was not tackled.

Bio-diversity proved difficult. It was recognised as easy to claim to stop the loss of species, but left open the question of how.

Health showed some progress with the acceptance of the WHO's Healthy Environments for Children (with the backing of a royal highness), and renewed support to fight HIV / AIDS, Malaria, TB and other diseases.

In the energy field, nuclear was present but not really at the centre of discussions. There were no numerical goals set on renewable energy.

The formal outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit were three-fold:

Firstly, there is the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development. Of interest to the Agency are: increase of access to basic requirements such as clean water, energy, health care, food security, etc. with emphasis on modern technology, technology transfer, human resource development, education and training.

Secondly, there was a reaffirmation of commitment to Agenda 21, and thirdly,

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, covering poverty eradication, WEHAB, trade and finance, governance, capacity building, Science and Technology, coastal zone management, and special emphasis on sustainable development in Africa as well as small island developing States.

The document has a number of action points - on energy including assisting developing countries in providing energy services; health including cancer, malaria, tuberculosis, dengue fever, HIV Aids, control of Trypanosomiasis; food and agriculture; freshwater including integrated water management as well as desalination; oceans including integrated coastal zone management; capacity building; technology transfer, and use of science and technology for decision making.

Partnerships have been promoted through the WSSD process, and in this field the Agency has already concluded four, covering sustainable energy development, water resources and harmful algal blooms in Africa.

It is, of course, very soon after the Summit, and we have much to follow up. There will, without doubt, be much of relevance to RCA in our future programmes and priorities.

In conclusion, Mr. Burkart would like to wish the meeting every success, and to reassure delegates of the commitment of the Agency's Technical Co-operation programme to bringing the nuclear and isotopic techniques at our disposal to the region's scientists, by capacity building through training and through research and development.

