



REGIONAL COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT
INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY



REPORT OF
VIRTUAL MEETING OF NATIONAL RCA REPRESENTATIVES

Virtual
18 April 2023

Introduction

The Virtual Meeting of National RCA Representatives was held virtually on 18th April, 2023.

The Meeting was attended by nineteen (19) Government Parties – AUL, BDG, CPR, FJI, IND, INS, JPN, ROK, LAO, MAL, MON, MYA, NZE, PAK, PHI, SIN, SRL, THA, and VIE. Representatives from the IAEA Technical Cooperation in Asia and Pacific (TCAP/IAEA) and the RCA Regional Office (RCARO) also participated in the Meeting. List of Participants is given in **Annex 1**.

The purpose of the Meeting was to share the results of the RCA Chairs Committee Meeting to Discuss and Propose Action Plans for Deployment and Execution of the RCA Ministerial Declaration of September 2022, held on 27 February - 02 March 2023, in Da Nang City, Viet Nam. The Meeting report is given in **Annex 2**.

Opening Session

a. Welcome Remarks by the RCA Chair (VIE)

Mr Tran Chi Thanh, RCA Chair and NR of VIE, delivered his welcome remarks to all the participants.

b. Opening Remarks by the Representative of the IAEA

Ms Jane Gerardo-Abaya, DIR-TCAP/IAEA, delivered her opening remarks.

c. Designation of rapporteurs and adoption of agenda

RCARO and VIE were appointed the rapporteurs of the meeting.

The proposed agenda of the meeting was adopted with no rejections (**Annex 3**).

1. Brief on the RCA Chairs meeting to discuss and propose action plans for deployment and execution of the RCA Declaration by the RCA Chairs

Mr Tran Chi Thanh, RCA Chair and NR of VIE, briefed on the conclusions and recommendations of the Meeting of the RCA Chairs Committee held on 27 February to 2 March 2023 (**Annex 4**). The Chair presented observations and recommendations under the key issues of the RCA Declaration as below;

- RCA Governance
- R&D Cooperation
- Technology Transfer/Diffusion of Proven Nuclear Technologies
- Nuclear Human Resource Development
- Partnership and Resource Mobilization

AUL pointed out that some of the observations and ideas on the presentation were not the results concluded from the discussions of the Chairs Committee Meeting.

The Meeting took note of the recommendations from the Meeting and decided to review and discuss under each item.

2. Review of Chairs' recommendation to enhance the RCA Governance

Under the RCA Governance, the following recommendations were reviewed;

- Encourage GPs appoint NRs with the relevant position and duration to ensure effective fulfilment of his/her responsibilities as outlined in the GOR.
- The roles and responsibilities of the Committee of the RCA Chairs should be further specified and strengthened.
- NRs consider establishing procedures when disputes arise.

The Meeting agreed on the importance of the roles of RCA NRs in the effective operation of the RCA Programme and supported that the GPs should appoint appropriate personnel to the NR position. The proposal of a booklet and training for new NRs was suggested as a way to empower new NRs.

In regard to strengthening the roles and responsibilities of the Committee of the RCA Chairs, AUL and JPN shared their observations that the current RCA system on chairship is well-established and stipulated in the RCA GOR, thus there is no need for improvement/revision on this issue. AUL suggested the creation of a Chairs Booklet may assist in-coming Chairs preparation for hosting the NRM.

For the procedures for the disputes, AUL, JPN, ROK, NZE and PAK emphasized that RCA's decision making is based on consensus as stipulated in the RCA Agreement 2017 and RCA GOR. For any pending issues, this kind of ad-hoc meeting could be held to discuss further to reach an agreement among the GPs. The principle of the RCA is to make decisions collegially, and in instances where there has not been consensus, then a decision to proceed cannot be made. The meeting affirmed to make decisions without the consent of all GPs would compromise the ownership of GPs.

3. Review of Chairs' recommendation to strengthen the R&D cooperation under the RCA

Under the R&D cooperation, the following recommendations were reviewed;

- To note the proposal to establish a network among the National Nuclear Research Institutes (NNRIs) to promote R&D cooperation under the RCA.
- The RCARO is requested to prepare a discussion paper including proposed action plan to submit to the 45th NRM for consideration of the NRs.

The Meeting took note of the recommendations and decided to continue discussions at the upcoming 45th RCA NRM based on discussion paper to be prepared by the RCARO.

4. Review of Chairs' recommendation to promote the transfer of mature/proven nuclear technologies under the RCA

In regard to the promotion of the transfer of mature/proven nuclear technologies under the RCA, the following recommendations were presented for review;

- The NRs consider organizing a forum, engaging a widened range of stakeholders from policy makers to the end-users as a way to disseminate the advantages of and promote adoption and applications of proven nuclear technologies.

- RCA Chair prepare a discussion paper on organizing the forum to submit to the 45th NRM for consideration.

There was a lack of clarity and understanding on what this proposal actually entailed, and so GPs agreed to revisit this issue when more details were presented. The IAEA said this proposal was more about engaging private industry.

The Meeting took note of the recommendations and decided to continue discussions at the upcoming 45th RCA NRM based on the discussion paper to be prepared by VIE.

5. Review of Chairs' recommendation to improve nuclear HRD under the RCA

6. Review of Chairs' recommendation to strengthen the partnership and resources mobilization under the RCA

For the items on the HRD and partnership/resource mobilization, the following recommendations were presented for review;

- The WG on the RCA MTS Coordination makes the ongoing efforts which includes drafting the terms of reference for a HRD committee for further discussion at the 45th NRM.
- The Chair of the RCA SPS Committee is requested to continue providing detailed clarification to all questions from the GPs at the 45th NRM.
- To note the need to establish a structured and systemic approach for facilitating partnerships and resource mobilization.
- To consider to establish a specialized committee with required skill sets involving RCA the key stakeholders with relevant expertise, such as the RCA Chairs, PAC, IAEA and RCARO, taking the leading roles.
- To consider to establish bilateral and triangular cooperations as well as small groups of GPs.

The Meeting took note that ToRs for the two standing committees, on HRD and partnership/resource mobilization, are being drafted by the WG on MTS Coordination to be presented at the upcoming 45th RCA NRM. The Meeting decided to continue discussions under the two items after review of those ToRs.

7. Solution to piloting the RCA Scholarship Programme (the pending issue)

8.

Upon invitation by the RCA Chair, Dr Duong Thanh Tung, Deputy Head of Education, Research and Development of Nuclear Training Center, VINATOM of VIE, delivered a presentation entitled "Report of the Committee of the RCA Scholarship Programme – Development of RCA Scholarship (Annex 5).” He summarized Vietnam’s Final Feasibility Study that includes the rationale, background, and budget plan of the RCA Scholarship Programme. He also briefed on the proposal for the pilot programme (3 years). The presentation included the conclusions and recommendations as below;

- The RCA Scholarship programme is essential to sustain the high-quality nuclear workforce in RCA GPs.
- The scenario 3 is recommended and feasible to implement the RCA Scholarship programme during the pilot phase.
- In order to maintain and sustain this Programme, it is necessary to have the strong commitment of financial support from IAEA and the GPs

- The IAEA is strongly recommended to build up the HRD TC Project to sustain and ensure the finance mobilization for this Programme.
- Pilot phase will be a good input for in-depth study of SPS for the next phase.

AUL supports the general concept of scholarships for development, as demonstrated by the long standing *Australian Awards* program, and Australian financial support for the IAEA Marie Sklodowska-Curie Scholarship Programme.

AUL pointed out that there already exist scholarship programmes at national/international levels within the IAEA Technical Cooperation Department and that scholarships are best placed in those levels of the IAEA (i.e. Not within the RCA).

AUL noted that RCA projects must benefit the region and be available to all GPs rather than only benefitting a limited number of countries.

AUL said that many of its questions on the proposed scholarships programme remain unanswered.

AUL, JPN, and ROK raised their voice on the credibility of the current FS especially in terms of funding and long-term sustainability. AUL and JPN questioned the source of the IAEA funds and highlighted that if the RCA TCF were to be used for this purpose, it should follow the approval process of the Board of Governors. ROK underlined that the RCA TCF has constantly decreased over the past years and the scholarship programme is not feasible without the consent of the resource providing GPs. They raised the need for a feasibility study by a third party as the current FS is a summary of survey results rather than a thorough study on the feasibility/sustainability of the programme.

RCA-FP clarified that the budget to be allocated to the programme is not the RCA TCF, but provided no further details as to where the funding would come from at this stage. He emphasized that the NRs have already agreed to establish the committee and the current FS is acceptable. He mentioned that this pilot programme is strongly supported by the senior management of the IAEA.

IAEA DIR-TCAP agreed on the importance and complexity of the issue. She mentioned the different understanding of “Feasibility Study” by some GPs and recommended AUL to give the specific scope of the FS and lead the FS according to the expectations.

PAK agreed on the significance of this topic to some GPs. However, PAK emphasized on several good mechanisms for granting scholarships at different international/national levels and suggested to consider how the current programme can benefit the whole RCA.

RCA Chair clarified that all questions raised by AUL, JPN and ROK have already been answered via email after the 51st RCA GCM.

On the other hand, AUL and JPN pointed out that outstanding questions remain to be unsolved. Due to the lack of consensus RCA GPs agreed to have discussions at the upcoming 45th RCA NRM on the pilot programme.

9. Practical arrangements for the NRM in Sydney (AUL)

AUL briefed on the arrangements for the 45th RCA NRM. AUL asked for registration on the official website for those who haven’t registered yet for further administrative arrangements. AUL also shared the plan for the technical tour to ANSTO on Friday.

Closure

The RCA Chair delivered his closing remarks and thanked all participants for their active participation and valuable contributions and declared the meeting adjourned.