

25TH RCA NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES MEETING
COLOMBO, SRI LANKA, 26-28 MAY 2003

Opening Address

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Dr. Douglas Nethsinghe, Chairman, Advisory Committee of Atomic Energy Authority
Prof. Rohini Hewamanna, Chairperson, Atomic Energy Authority of Sri Lanka
Mr. P. Subasinghe, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Econ. Reform & Sci. & Tech., Sri Lanka
Distinguished National Representatives of RCA Member States
Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. It is with great pleasure that, on behalf of the International Atomic Energy Agency and on my own behalf, I join the host country, Sri Lanka, in welcoming you to the 25th RCA National Representatives Meeting, and to convey to you my best wishes for a successful meeting. I thank the host country for the warm hospitality accorded to all of us.

2. This is a very special meeting for me. It is the first RCA meeting since I was appointed Director of the Division for Africa, East Asia and the Pacific last October. I therefore wish to take this opportunity to assure you of my strong support to RCA and that I look forward to working with you to make sure that the Agreement moves from strength to strength in exploiting the power of the atom for sustainable development of the region.

3. RCA has been a valuable mechanism for capacity building and technology transfer relating to nuclear applications since 1972. It was the first regional agreement to be formed and served as a model for the establishment of similar agreements such as ARCAL for Latin America, AFRA for Africa, and most recently, ARASIA for West Asia.

4. About 31 years since it was founded, RCA can look back with pride on what has been achieved in nuclear technology applications in areas such as agriculture, energy, research reactor, industry, environment, health and very important, radiation protection. This is a result of good visioning by the founding fathers and commitment and hard work by all Member States and individuals. In this respect I wish to pay special tribute to past RCA Coordinators some of whom are here with us today, namely Dr. Machi, Dr. Kobayashi and Dr. Easy. The five-year extension to 2007 of the RCA Agreement is a clear sign of the importance Member States attach to this collaboration. For this, I congratulate you.

5. Notwithstanding the good performance of RCA, I know that you have always looked for ways to improve your programme; at times you probably have been over self-critical. This is clear from your past deliberations and from the agenda of this meeting in which I see that you are not only going to discuss operational matters but also important strategic issues.

6. RCA is gradually evolving from a programme largely managed by IAEA to a programme managed by the region itself. In the process you have and are continuing to encounter a number of challenges, such as (a) developing regional management and the concept of Lead Country in the design and implementation of projects, (b) enhancing self-reliance of nuclear institutions and hence their survival, (c) ensuring continued relevance of the RCA programme to socio-economic development and to national and regional development plans.

7. Now, allow me to cite an evolutionary aspect of RCA that I consider of critical importance. Several facilities in National Research Institutes in the developing countries in the region have gradually been taking leadership roles by hosting IAEA training events and supervising fellows from other countries. Many of these facilities have reached this level because of the assistance provided by the Agency in the form of equipment and manpower training in addition to significant investment by the Member States themselves. These facilities have developed into valuable Regional Resource Units that have been adopted for enhancing regional ownership and TCDC. As you may be aware, the IAEA Board of Governors review of the TC Strategy in 2002 stressed the importance of ensuring that capabilities that have been established are sustained. I will have an opportunity to brief you on the TC Strategy later this morning.

8. Let me close by, once again, renewing my commitment to support RCA and to work closely with you in exploiting the power of the atom for the good of the region and mankind in general. I wish you a fruitful meeting.

26 May 2003