

42nd Regional Meeting of National RCA Representatives

Online Meeting

23 April 2020

Welcoming Remarks

by

Ms Jane Gerardo-Abaya
Director, Division for Asia and the Pacific
Department of Technical Cooperation
International Atomic Energy Agency

Distinguished RCA Chair,

Distinguished Delegates and Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you today at this unprecedented first online Regional Meeting of the National Representatives of the Regional Co-operative Agreement for Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology for Asia and the Pacific Region (RCA). These are very unusual times for us all, but I trust we will be able to hold an effective and productive meeting.

First of all, I would like to convey the congratulations and compliments of Mr Dazhu Yang, Deputy Director General and Head of the Department of Technical Cooperation, to everyone here. He apologizes for not being able to join the meeting due to his other commitments. He has asked me to express his appreciation for the organization of the first online RCA National Representatives Meeting in the history of the RCA, and to thank the RCA Chair and RCA State Parties for their joint efforts to conduct this meeting online. This really demonstrates the commitment of the RCA State Parties to promote the application of nuclear science and technology for sustainable socio-economic development in the region, especially in this pandemic situation - an unprecedented challenge for us all. Mr Yang would like to affirm that the Agency is continuing to deliver its service and support to Member States in fighting against the Covid-19 pandemic. He also suggests the RCA should brainstorm on the role of nuclear

technology in combating disease pandemics now and in the future. He wishes all of you good health, and every success for the meeting.

On behalf of the IAEA, allow me to warmly welcome all the National RCA Representatives, the Director of the RCA Regional Office, delegates and participants. I take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to Mr T.M.R. Tennakoon, Director General of the Sri Lanka Atomic Energy Board, for his close and effective cooperation with the Agency in the management of the RCA programme over the past year, and to acknowledge all the good results achieved during his Chairmanship.

I also convey my heartfelt congratulations to the Government of Malaysia on taking over the Chairmanship of the RCA and to Dr Abdul Muin Abdul Rahman as he assumes the role of RCA Chair to lead this very important and dynamic Regional Cooperative Agreement in 2020. I am confident that under your able Chairmanship the RCA programme will continue its successful progress, and that it will make a substantive contribution to positive socioeconomic impact in RCA State Parties.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To date, eighteen countries have deposited their instrument of acceptance of the new Regional Cooperative Agreement 2017. This shows strong interest and commitment in the region to the RCA, and I wish to congratulate you all. I encourage the remaining four countries (China, Fiji, Philippines and Laos) to complete their internal procedures and submit their instruments of acceptance to the Director General as soon as possible.

It is gratifying to note the efficient delivery of the RCA programme in 2019, and its excellent record of achievements. These included the training of 336 people through 14 regional training courses; the organization of 15 regional meetings, attended by 272 participants; and the conduct of 17 expert missions. As a result, a very high implementation rate of about 94% was achieved. I am also very pleased to note that programme monitoring has been seamlessly performed – a full 100% of the Project Progress Assessment Reports (PPARs) for the 2019 RCA projects were submitted on time via the IAEA IT platform.

Tangible achievements have been made under RCA projects. For example, under project RAS6085, 'Enhancing Stereotactic Body Radiation Therapy (SBRT) for Frequent Cancers in

the RCA Region’, over 735 radiation oncologists, 275 medical physicists and 730 radiation therapists were trained for SBRT; more than 300 new radiotherapy centres have been using SBRT; and more than 150,000 cancer patients have been treated using SBRT. In addition, seven Regional Training Hubs have been established (Korea Institute of Radiological and Medical Sciences, Korea; Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Australia; Beijing University Cancer Hospital, China; Tata Memorial Hospital, India; Tokyo Metropolitan Komagome Hospital, Japan; National Cancer Centre, Singapore; and Ramathibodi Hospital-Siriraj Hospital-Chulalongkorn Hospital, Thailand).

Under the project RAS7030, ‘Assessing Deep Groundwater Resources for Sustainable Management through the Utilization of Isotopic Techniques’, more than 150 project staff were trained on the use of isotope and related techniques in the assessment of hydrogeological problems; and over 5,000 samples were collected for analysis. Isotope hydrology has been well recognized by the relevant water authorities in many countries as a powerful technique to provide information on groundwater flow dynamics and processes that is not obtainable by other means. Many countries have developed their national database, which can be used for further groundwater and climate change investigations. In addition, over 250 reports and publications (both national and international) emanated from the project.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I note that the development of the RCA programme for the TC Cycle 2022–2023 is progressing well. Fifteen project concepts were submitted. These project concepts were reviewed and assessed by the RCA Programme Advisory Committee, then prioritized by all 22 State Parties. During this meeting, you will discuss and select the most appropriate project concepts to further develop into project designs for submission to the IAEA. I congratulate the RCA’s initiative, proactiveness, ownership and innovation in the development and formulation of the RCA programme for 2022–2023. I encourage the RCA to apply an innovative multi- and interdisciplinary approach, to harness intellectual capital and to utilize available expertise and technologies in the region. I encourage you to involve key stakeholders in project design to ensure that future RCA projects are sizeable and of long enough duration to produce the expected tangible socioeconomic impact.

I note with appreciation that strategic improvement initiatives are in progress in the development of the RCA programme for the TC Cycle 2022–2023, namely, assessment of the

social and economic impact of the RCA programme, as well as preparations for the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of RCA. These initiatives will lead to improved programme efficiency and effectiveness, and will enhance its relevance and visibility. I commend RCA State Parties for their contribution to the successful delivery of the programme in 2019 and for supporting the strategic initiative. With this momentum, I am convinced that the RCA will produce more substantive results in the future.

At present, our global community is facing the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. This pandemic may require all of us to seriously review its implications and impact on the way we live and work together, and the RCA is no exception. With its proactiveness, capabilities and creativity, the RCA is well positioned to pioneer new initiatives, starting with this virtual meeting. Already, the efficient preparatory work has taken strides forward in introducing nonconventional, innovative, creative and effective working modalities. This is a reflection of our common strong commitment to ensure the RCA programme is managed smoothly and efficiently despite the challenges, and to assure ourselves that it will continue to make an effective contribution to sustainable social and economic development in each country, and in the region as a whole.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to express my high appreciation to the RCA Regional Office, the RCA Programme Advisory Committee, and the Working Group on the 2018-2023 RCA Medium-Term Strategy Coordination. I congratulate the Chair of the RCA PAC, the Chair of the Working Group and the RCA Focal Person for their endeavours and dedication to the RCA.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to re-affirm the full collaboration of the IAEA, and the strong commitment of the Department of Technical Cooperation through the Division for Asia and the Pacific, in support of the RCA programme.

I wish you a very productive meeting, and I sincerely wish you and your families continued good health and safety.

Thank you for your attention.