

## Statement of Belgium at the International Conference on Nuclear Security

21 May 2024



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Permanent Representative  
of the Kingdom of Belgium

Excellencies,

To start, let me offer my country's condolences for the death of the President of Iran, its Minister of Foreign Affairs and other officials involved in the tragic helicopter crash of last Sunday, and express our deepest sympathies to the families of the victims and to the Iranian people.

Belgium aligns itself with the EU statement, as delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechia. I wish to thank the Agency and the Co-Chairs Australia and Kazakhstan for the organization of the fourth edition of ICONS, setting the scene for "Shaping the Future" of nuclear security worldwide. Belgium also aligns itself with the **Statement of the Co-Presidents**, recognizing the hard work they put into its negotiation. We deeply regret that it was not possible to reach consensus on a ministerial declaration due to the objection of one delegation.

The world is rapidly changing and threats to nuclear security remain real. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its illegal seizure of the ZNPP are a constant reminder of these ongoing and increasing threats. Nuclear safety and nuclear security need to be maintained at the highest level and protected by all. Therefore, it is up to Member States to take every possible precaution. My country is fully committed to **continue strengthening** nuclear security, particularly in the field of **prevention, the reduction of sensitive materials, and capacity building**.

***In terms of prevention***, Belgium is committed to continue developing and enhancing its national nuclear security regime. We established a strict

legislative and regulatory framework and have reinforced it, mainly with regard to response forces, screening, cyber-security, security of radioactive materials and surface waste disposal facilities.

***With respect to the reduction of sensitive materials***, we reaffirm our commitment to eliminate in time, when economically and technically feasible, the use of highly enriched uranium in civilian applications, in cooperation with the United States.

Belgium's medical isotope production facility, the Institut des Radio-éléments (IRE), has successfully completed its conversion to low-enriched uranium. I am also pleased to announce that three low-enriched uranium fuel assemblies have successfully been tested in Belgium's BR2 research reactor. The Belgian Nuclear Research Centre (SCK-CEN), plans to fully convert by 2026 the BR2 reactor to low enriched uranium, becoming **the world's first high performance research reactor** to operate on low-enriched uranium. Belgium is also investing in the new facility RECUMO to down-blend significant quantities of irradiated highly enriched uranium coming from the production of radioisotopes at IRE.

Belgium is proud to host, together with the IAEA, an International Physical Protection Advisory Service (IPPAS) Seminar in October this year. My country will request a second IPPAS mission, that should take place in 2027. We look forward to this mission and we expect its outcome will continue to prove the robustness of the Belgian nuclear security regime, as it was the case in 2014 and confirmed by the follow-up mission in 2019.

Furthermore, Belgium remains committed to **capacity building** by investing in **practical training for nuclear security experts in the whole of Europe**. The Belgian regulatory body hosted a National Training Course on the Security of Radioactive Material in Use and Storage last December. In addition, we welcomed public and private experts from 65 countries to the Second **International Symposium on Insider Threat Mitigation** in Brussels two months ago. The success of the Symposium, co-organized by the US National Nuclear Security Administration, shows the importance and relevance of risk mitigation in the nuclear field; be it internal or external. We must always stay ahead of all possible threats to nuclear security, which is impossible without international cooperation.

Continuing on the topic, I wish to draw your attention to **our side-event** in cooperation with the NNSA today at 13.15 in room M5. We will review the outcome of the Symposium and present the way forward for the International Working Group on Insider Threat Mitigation. In addition, we

will discuss future engagements and options towards the next Symposium in 2027.

Notwithstanding the basic principle that nuclear security is the responsibility of each individual State, **bilateral, regional and international cooperation is key**. We therefore reaffirm our support to the central role of the IAEA in facilitating and coordinating this cooperation. I would like to stress the importance of the assistance provided by the Agency, for instance in progressing towards the universalization and effective implementation of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and its Amendment.

Belgium remains committed to the Code of Conduct on the Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources since almost two decades and is additionally committed to implement **the IAEA Guidance on the Management of Disused Radioactive Sources**.

International cooperation is also key in both research on and future deployment of **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)**, with a focus on nuclear safety and security, safeguards and waste minimization. Belgium will continue to invest constructively in this area: at the regulatory level, it actively contributes to the NHSI initiative. At the research level, Belgium will continue to invest at SCK CEN in the development of lead-based SMRs.

Our commitment to capacity building and training in the field of nuclear security is reflected in Belgium's contributions to the new **Nuclear Security Training and Demonstration Centre** in Seibersdorf. We support the ambitions of the Agency and reiterate our commitment to its activities.

I wish to underline that the IAEA needs a **secure, sustainable and sufficient financial footing** for its work on nuclear security, including from the Regular Budget. We believe that the regular budget for Nuclear Security could and should be strengthened within existing resources. Since 2015, Belgium has contributed to the **Nuclear Security Fund**, for a total of more than half a million euros. We encourage countries that are in a position to do so, to also commit funds.

Excellencies,

We look forward to the contribution of this Conference in shaping the future of nuclear security.

In conclusion, let me assure you that Belgium remains fully committed to continue to strengthen international cooperation in nuclear security, which is after all a collective responsibility.

Thank you.