



**NATIONAL STATEMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
DELIVERED BY AMBASSADOR RAPULANE MOLEKANE**

ON

21 MAY 2024

AT

ICONS2024

Co-Presidents,

Director General of the IAEA,

Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset we would like to join other delegations in expressing our sincere condolences to the Islamic Republic of Iran on the loss of their President and Foreign Minister.

South Africa thanks the co-presidents of the Conference, Australia, and Kazakhstan, for their efforts in the lead up to the Conference and would like to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation in all proceedings of ICONS 2024.

My delegation would also like to thank the Director General, Mr Rafael Grossi, for hosting this fourth ministerial conference on nuclear security under the banner "*Shaping the Future*" which affords *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)* Member States the opportunity to substantively engage on all the critical areas of this important issue.

Co-Presidents,

This year's ICONS takes place in an international context which is characterised by increased tensions, armed conflicts, and the re-emergence of once taboo rhetoric on the use or threat of use of the nuclear weapons. We remain concerned that despite the reaffirmation of the common goal of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in ICONS Declarations for over a decade, no tangible progress has been attained in this domain. This is evidenced by the growth in nuclear weapon stockpiles and growing threats of use of nuclear weapons, including the threat by Israel to use nuclear weapons against innocent civilians in Gaza. We condemn the ongoing genocide being carried out on the people of Palestine and welcome the recent

Co – Presidents,

South Africa believes that this Conference and its technical outcomes has the potential to make an important contribution in supporting Member States' work to strengthen their respective national nuclear security regimes, and also contribute to international peace and security.

However, more is needed. We cannot fully strengthen international nuclear security efforts as long as nuclear weapons continue to exist. South Africa therefore remains firm in its conviction that a world free of nuclear weapons must remain our shared commitment and collective goal. Nuclear security has to be approached within the overall framework of our common objectives and commitment to nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the promotion of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

In this regard, whilst recognising the importance for nuclear security in minimising the use of HEU on a voluntary basis where technically and economically feasible, South Africa remains concerned by the imbalance in this discussion. HEU used for peaceful purposes is only a tiny fraction of the existing HEU stocks and therefore, any meaningful discussions on nuclear security must focus on the security for both civilian and military material.

My delegation considers initiatives of the Agency to address the challenges associated with nuclear facilities operating in extraordinary circumstances, including those impacting on nuclear security, to be timely. In this regard, we encourage the Conference to reaffirm the inviolability of peaceful nuclear activities and that any attack or threat of attack against peaceful nuclear facilities constitutes a grave violation of international law, principles and purposes of the UN Charter and statute of the IAEA.

Co-Presidents

While nuclear security remains the sovereign responsibility of each Member State, South Africa welcomes the progress made to strengthen nuclear security internationally, through the important work of the IAEA.

The IAEA has unique capabilities and expertise to support Member States and coordinate international cooperation on all nuclear related matters on a global scale, including on nuclear security upon request from Member States. We strongly support the work of the IAEA in the provision of training and capacity building. In this regard, we reaffirm the critical importance of ensuring equitable geographical distribution and gender equality in all IAEA nuclear security activities. We call on all Member States to establish inclusive workforces in their national nuclear security regimes, including ensuring equal access to education and training.

South Africa shares international interest in advanced nuclear technologies, including Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), to support our developmental objectives. We attach great value to the technical work conducted by the Agency to develop suitable nuclear security guidance, including for these new developments, and the decisions adopted by the appropriate policy-making bodies of the Agency in this regard.

Co-Presidents,

South Africa has a long history of utilising nuclear technologies for both power generation and other peaceful applications. As a responsible producer and user of nuclear technologies and materials, we remain fully committed to maintaining a strong national nuclear security regime in respect of all nuclear and radioactive material, as well as nuclear facilities in our country.

Recalling the guiding vision of the IAEA to “*seek to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world*”, efforts to strengthen nuclear security should not limit our sovereign right to access nuclear energy and technology for peaceful purposes. South Africa insists that strengthened nuclear security should not become a precondition or burden to accessing the benefits of nuclear energy and technology.

We welcome the growing adherence to the relevant international legal instruments, and we are pleased to announce that South Africa deposited our instrument of adherence to the *Amendment of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material* earlier in the year.

In conclusion, we underscore that deliberations during the conference neither prejudices the detailed positions of Member States on specific nuclear security issues nor supplants the technical work conducted by the Agency. We further encourage that efforts must be made to ensure that future declarations are procedurally and substantively, inclusive, balanced and reflects the views of all Member States.

Thank you.