

Intervention of Mrs. Ala NEMERENCO, Minister of Health of the Republic of Moldova at the IAEA Ministerial Conference, Vienna, Austria,

26–28 November 2024

Distinguished delegates, esteemed colleagues,

I would like first of all to extend my sincere gratitude to the organizers of this Ministerial Conference for inviting me and convey to you the warmest greetings on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Moldova.

Allow me to begin by highlighting that enhancing the capacities of the Institute of Oncology and advancing oncology treatments in our country are among the top priorities of the Government of the Republic of Moldova. These priorities are also central to my strategic objectives as Minister of Health. Over the past three years, the Ministry of Health has invested significant resources in this area.

The modernization of radiodiagnosis and radiotherapy techniques, along with the development of human capacity, has been a central focus in our country's profile framework. The results are substantial. Earlier this year, a CT with protocols for Cancer diagnosis was installed at the Institute of Oncology and we are currently finalizing the installation of an MRI system. Also, an important number of Departments have been modernized and equipped accordingly and we will continue the modernization process in the upcoming years.

In 2009, with the support of the IAEA's Technical Cooperation Department, Moldova installed its first linear accelerator at the PMSI Institute of Oncology in Chisinau. More recently, in 2022, a new linear accelerator (VitalBeam) was commissioned under the MOL Project. This project was made possible through an in-kind contribution of 500,000 Euros from the Moldovan Ministry of Health. The VitalBeam system has enhanced our radiotherapy capabilities to visualize tumors in three dimensions, thereby improving efficiency, productivity, and patient safety.

The installation of a new Co-60 source in 2021, alongside the afore-mentioned linear accelerators, has significantly increased the number of patients treated with radiotherapy in Moldova. However, there remains a pressing need for additional capacity. According to a 2022 WHO assessment, Moldova requires a total of eight LINACs to adequately meet the country's needs. The demand for radiotherapy has further increased due to the influx of Ukrainian refugees seeking treatment in Moldova.

In response to these needs, a new linear accelerator, which is planned to be installed in early 2025, was procured this year with the support of the Agency and an in-kind contribution of 1.118 million Euros from the Moldovan Government under the new MOL Project, financial recourses being donated by Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in the context of refugee crisis and war in Ukraine. These efforts align with the goals of our National Cancer Control Program 2016–2025.

Using this opportunity, I would like to commend the International Atomic Energy Agency for its regional projects, which are crucial for training medical personnel and medical physicists in radiotherapy, radio diagnostics, and nuclear medicine. In many cases, these projects provide the only opportunity for our professionals to learn about the latest technologies and international best practices, thereby strengthening our national capabilities.

Certainly, the installation of this modern equipment requires suitable facilities. Accordingly, with the support of the US National Nuclear Security Administration program, the construction of a new bunker to accommodate two new LINACs, will be finalized by the end of 2024. We are particularly grateful for this support.

Going forward, the Ministry of Health has ambitious plans to extend the National Cancer Control Program for the next decade, starting in 2025. Our goals include increasing the number of linear accelerators, expanding brachytherapy capabilities and nuclear medicine services, and establishing a theragnostic department within the Institute of Oncology. Additionally, we plan to develop two radiotherapy departments in the southern and northern regions of Moldova, within the new Balti and Cahul regional hospitals, which are expected to become operational by 2028.

In response to new challenges in our region, the Ministry of Health is also working on emergency preparedness and medical response contingency plans for potential radiological and nuclear accidents. Four reference hospitals, equipped with advanced capabilities to provide medical care for patients exposed to radiation, will be designated. In this area as well, our health personnel continue to benefit from the invaluable support of the Agency.

Distinguished delegates,

In closing, I would like to reiterate the Republic of Moldova's deep appreciation for the continued support of the International Atomic Energy Agency and its member states. The progress we have achieved in modernizing oncology services, expanding radiotherapy capacity, and developing our human resources would not have been possible without your collaboration and shared commitment to advancing health care worldwide.

As we look to the future, Moldova remains committed to strengthening its partnerships with the Agency and other international stakeholders. Together, we can address the challenges ahead, ensuring that all patients, regardless of their circumstances, have access to the highest standards of care.

I thank you for your attention.