



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Dublin Castle

26 March 2007

We the Environment Ministers of Ireland, Iceland, Norway, and Austria, met in Dublin today (26 March 2007). Among the issues discussed was the current international debate on the future role of nuclear energy particularly in the context of climate change.

It is the shared view of the Ministers present that it remains the sovereign right of each country to decide on its energy mix. However, for Ireland, Iceland, Norway, and Austria, we voice serious concern that nuclear energy is being presented as a solution to climate change. It is our collective view that the current debate seeks to downplay the environmental, waste, proliferation, nuclear liability and safety issues and seeks to portray nuclear energy as a clean, safe and problem free response to climate change. The inherent risks and problems associated with the nuclear energy option remain and it can not therefore claim to be a clean alternative to fossil fuel use.

The trans boundary nature of the risks associated with nuclear energy and our collective responsibility towards the health and environment of our citizens dictates that we must ensure that their interests and concerns are represented in relation to all nuclear projects and installations. Only the highest levels of safety must be respected and maintained at all nuclear installations. In this regard the specific international liability regimes currently in place for the nuclear industry do not provide full scope compensation for potential damage or injury and provide a hidden subsidy to that industry.

The reality remains that after 50 years of nuclear power the issue of waste remains most intractable. The legacy of the nuclear industry for many generations to come continues to increase with little evidence of any real implementation of necessary long term solutions to the waste issue. Nuclear waste reprocessing, advocated as a solution to the management of nuclear waste, has long since lost its lustre and today the industry remains economically and environmentally untenable.

Reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel represents a key source of pollution risks and remains a significant source of radioactive pollution. In particular, we have continuing concerns regarding the ongoing reprocessing operations at Sellafield and the planned reopening of the THORP plant at that facility.

The planned reopening of the THORP plant follows the leak of 83,000 litres of highly radioactive and acidic liquid from an accountancy tank in April 2005 and the publication of an internal report on the incident by the operator which pointed to serious and extensive undermining and breakdown of the safety culture and practice in Sellafield. The importance of safety is underscored by the fact that reprocessing has resulted in the accumulation of very large volumes of extremely hazardous liquid high level waste (HLW) at Sellafield. This waste represents a considerable pollution risk both to the UK and neighbouring countries in the event of a serious accident or incident.

We call upon the United Kingdom Government to desist from reopening the plant on the grounds that this will inevitably increase radioactive discharges, the risk of radioactive pollution and because of the consistent and long standing poor safety performance at the plant over many years. Reprocessing should cease and effort and resources directed to the closure and decommissioning of the Sellafield Plant.

We request that, at a minimum, the safety case for reopening THORP be subject to an international expert peer review.

It was noted that the UK has committed to the Sintra strategy under the OSPAR Convention which provides for substantial and progressive reduction of discharges to the marine environment by 2020.

We re-emphasise our commitment to continue to articulate our shared concerns regarding nuclear energy and call upon nuclear countries to take decisive action in addressing the unresolved issues arising from the operation of nuclear facilities namely, safety concerns, pollution risks, radioactive discharges, nuclear liability, waste and proliferation risks.

It was agreed that the Dublin meeting had been very productive and worth while and that a further meeting of the Ministers and other interested States will take place in Vienna in the autumn of 2007.

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