



**International Symposium on Marine Pollution
Opening Statement**

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Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this UN International Year of the Ocean, it is a pleasure for me to open one of its major events: the International Symposium on Marine Pollution organized by the IAEA, hosted by the Principality of Monaco and co-sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), in co-operation with the International Commission for Scientific Exploration of the Mediterranean Sea.

This week also coincides with the inauguration of the new facilities of the IAEA's Marine Environment Laboratory (MEL) in Monaco. Since the opening of the first IAEA International Laboratory of Marine Radioactivity in 1961, with the generous support of the Principality of Monaco, the contribution of MEL to international scientific understanding of the marine environment has been widely recognized.

The oceans are the world's largest natural resource. They cover 70 per cent of the Earth's surface and account for 80 per cent of the world's natural biodiversity. Two thirds of the world's population lives in coastal regions. They depend on the oceans for food, employment, transportation and recreation. Two billion tons of carbon dioxide are absorbed

by oceans each year, making them one of the Earth's key defences against global warming. In short, human life on Earth as we know it, depends on the health of the oceans.

In this century, mankind has not looked after the oceans wisely or well. We have only just begun to realize that ocean pollution from human activities has serious implications for our common future. The challenge we face is to deepen our scientific understanding and to use that as a basis for purposeful preventive and remedial action.

The purpose of this Symposium is to share the latest scientific knowledge on the sources, behaviour and impact of marine contaminants throughout the global ocean. Developments in high-sensitivity analytical measurements of contaminants, with emphasis on nuclear and isotopic methods, will be a major topic. The findings of this Symposium will link directly into the decisions of policy makers affecting the future well-being of our marine environment.

In this context I would draw your attention to Chapter VII of the 1998 Lisbon Declaration which culminated the work of the Independent World Commission on the Oceans. I quote:

“We must make full use of the best available scientific knowledge and apply as widely as possible in ocean space the technology which is most appropriate. We must also encourage systematic prior assessments of impacts relating to hazardous activities and new technologies. The achievement of these goals depends upon the genuine co-operation among governments, including widespread sharing of knowledge and technology with disadvantaged countries.”

In this period of rapid economic and population growth, meeting the urgent challenge of protecting the oceans requires international cooperation. The UN system plays a key role in focusing attention and fostering international collaboration. The International Year of the Ocean was a UNESCO initiative formally adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1994. It aims to bring ocean issues to the attention of decision makers and the public. The IAEA is proud to be associated with these aims.

Within the UN family of organizations, the IAEA was established to be the focal point for international co-operation in the safe use of nuclear energy for peace and development. In pursuing these objectives, our role is to be an objective institution that serves as a centre for sharing scientific information and setting standards, independent analysis, expert advice, technology transfer and impartial oversight and verification.

Contributing to the protection of the oceans from the harmful effects of human activity is a major part of many Agency programmes in the areas of nuclear safety, research and isotopes and technology transfer. The IAEA Marine Environment Laboratory is the only such laboratory in the UN system. It plays a central role in providing the scientific and technical basis which underpins these programmes.

The objective of minimizing radioactive contamination of the oceans requires the highest standards of safety to be applied in all activities from the mining of uranium to the transportation and management of waste. The Agency's efforts to establish a global nuclear safety regime comprising international agreements, scientific and technical safety standards and the provision of safety assistance services, are an essential part of meeting this objective.

In this context, more attention needs to be focused on the urgent need for decisions to be made to implement available technical solutions for the safe management of spent fuel and the final disposal of radioactive waste to avoid the possibility of these materials contaminating the marine environment.

And where past military activities and waste disposal practices have left radiological materials in the marine environment, the Agency, at the request of Member States, has conducted a series of studies to assess present and future radiological conditions and offer scientific and technical advice. In this context, IAEA laboratories both here and at Seibersdorf outside Vienna, have played a leading role most recently in the collection and analysis of scientific data for the marine environmental assessment of French nuclear testing at the Pacific atolls of Mururoa and Fangataufa.

The use of radiotracer and isotopic techniques has become an increasingly important tool for understanding marine processes and monitoring the sources and behaviour of contaminants. Through its participation in the Global Programme of Action for Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities, the IAEA assists States in the use of nuclear techniques for monitoring contaminants in the marine environment and controlling numerous pollution sources.

But it is equally important to track what effects man-made radiation has had on the oceans in the past half century, and on marine ecosystems. This work is the subject of the five year project of “Research on Worldwide Marine Radioactivity” which aims to provide an end of the century assessment of man-made radionuclides levels in the oceans and seas. Some ten countries are involved in the ocean sampling and analysis for this project and many more are contributing data on oceanic radioactivity to the database being assembled with the support of the Government of Japan.

Effective surveillance of contaminants and control of marine pollution clearly depends on adequate institutional capacity to identify and measure concentrations of pollutants accurately. Through the Inter-Agency Programme on Marine Pollution, the IAEA, UNEP and UNESCO, have joined forces to provide data quality assurance services to regional programmes and country laboratories. IAEA activities include conducting monitoring, assessment, training, quality control and technology transfer activities in the area of non-nuclear marine pollution.

Support for nuclear technology transfer for exclusively peaceful purposes not only contributes to the goals of sustainable development and improvement of human welfare but is also an integral part of the international consensus on sharing peaceful uses of nuclear energy; as embodied in the IAEA Statute and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Thus, through several Co-ordinated Research Projects, the Agency is providing direct assistance to developing countries to enhance their abilities to monitor and control marine pollution.

For example, the Co-ordinated Research Project on the Distribution, Fate and Effects of Pesticides on Biota in the Tropical Marine Environment, which involves 17 countries, has as one of its aims to improve national capacities to assess and monitor pesticide concentrations

which, together with land use data, would provide the foundation for developing land and water resource management strategies to ensure ecosystem stability.

In the Black Sea region, the IAEA has been providing support for comprehensive assessment of Black Sea radioactivity and has been helping to establish a co-ordinated monitoring and emergency response system for radionuclides in the Sea. Our laboratories have been collaborating with the Black Sea Environment Programme and with regional laboratories in upgrading monitoring capabilities on non-radioactive contaminants. We look forward this week to charting how further progress can be made in this area.

I wish to conclude by expressing to you all my warmest wishes for a successful Symposium. The agenda for a sustainable future for mankind in the new millennium has many topics. The future of our ocean environment is among the most urgent and important.