



Opening Remarks

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**International Symposium on Communicating Nuclear
and Radiological Emergencies to the Public**

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Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honour and privilege for me to serve as President of the first International Symposium for on Communicating during a Nuclear or and Radiological Emergencyies to the Public. I am pleased to see that it has attracted such a high level of interest and participation, which reflects the growing recognition that effective public communication is of vital importance.

I would like to recognize the IAEA leadership of IAEA Deputy Director General, Nuclear Safety and Security, Juan Carlos Lentijo, and Elena Bulgova, Head of the IAEA's Incident and Emergency Centre, and Serge Gas, Director of Public Information and Communication, for making this symposium a priority in the IAEA's Agency's activities for 2018. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the commitment of three IAEA colleagues: the Deputy-Director General and Head of the Department of Nuclear Safety and Security, Juan Carlos Lentijo; the Head of the IAEA's Incident and Emergency Centre, Elena Bulgova; and the Director of the Office of Public Information and Communication, Serge Gas.

In fact, this symposium is rooted in the IAEA's International Conference on Global Emergency Preparedness and Response that was held in October 2015. That post-Fukushima conference brought together experts in emergency preparedness and response to discuss best practices and focus on strengthening national systems in dealing with nuclear and radiological emergencies. The conference was chaired by a colleague of mine from Canada's nuclear regulator, Mr. Ramzi Jammal, and an outcome of that conference was a call to bring together experts in emergency preparedness response and public communication to share best practices and to discuss approaches to improving public communication. This week, we will fulfill that commitment.

I am very proud of the work that has been done by the IAEA Secretariat and the Programme Committee for the Symposium. We have brought together an amazing and diverse collection of speakers and perspectives – and together we will learn from each other, get to know one another and inspire each other to do better on public communications in nuclear and radiological emergencies.

As Elena always reminds us, One of the IAEA's core principles emphasizes that "eEmergency response begins with preparedness". I would like to build on her this sentiment in two ways. First, of course, public communications in emergency response begins with communications preparedness as well. But, second, I would extend that communications preparedness requires better routine, ongoing and day-to-day communication on all of our nuclear activities – whether in nuclear science, nuclear operations, nuclear regulation, health, industrial or medicine applications – in order to build a better base understanding from which to communicate with the public.

In fact, I believe that better routine communication is the best inoculation to fight misinformation and fearmongering that occurs in heightened anxious environments around nuclear and radiological emergencies. And this week, we will be examining a wide range of emergency situations, from major facility accidents to transport, industrial and medical events. Any of them mismanaged, both in terms of their response and / or communications, diminishes public trust in our institutions.

I would also like to emphasize the evolution, dare I say, revolution, in public communications:

- When the accident occurred at Three Mile Island in the late 1970s, most Americans were getting their news in two doses – pardon the pun – newspapers in the morning and television in the evening.
- A decade later, local residents at Pripyat were informed by loudspeaker of the Chernobyl accident and advised to evacuate. Notwithstanding the deliberate attempts by the Soviet government to conceal the extent of the Chernobyl accident from local residents and the international community in mid-1980s, loudspeakers were used to inform local residents at Pripyat and advise them to evacuate.
- While the last major nuclear accident occurred at Fukushima seven years ago in a more modern age of telecommunications, with 24/7 television coverage and initial social media such as Facebook and Twitter, it's important to note that many of the most popular and ubiquitous social media platforms were either fledgling or hadn't been created.

In fact, as a father of teenage children, I can tell you that email is ancient technology for them. They are blessed to grow up in an era where information is pushed to them on the platform of their choosing. This is the reality of today and tomorrow's expectations.

It's also why I'm very proud of the IAEA for running a youth competition as part of this symposium, reaching out to tomorrow's leaders and inspiring us to think differently and prepare today for tomorrow's audience. I am very much looking forward to Thursday's competition and the results.

Another aspect of the symposium that I'm particularly looking forward to is the discussion on exercises. We have a good cross-section of emergency preparedness and communications professionals who must work seamlessly together to get the right information out to the public in a timely manner. This is essential. Through these sessions, I expect best practices to be shared and lessons learned. I want to give a shout-out to my own country, Canada, which is holding a full-scale nuclear emergency exercise this week, simulating an emergency at the Point Lepreau nuclear power plant – and if I wasn't chairing this session, I would be engaged in that exercise back home.

We have a jam-packed agenda. I would ask that speakers adhere to the guidance of the chairs and for the chairs to ensure speakers stick to their allotted time so that we can accommodate all of the presentations and discussions that we have planned for this week.

Finally, I appreciate the opportunity to be part of this important event, which, I am sure, will contribute to our efforts to further strengthen communications to the public during a nuclear or radiological emergency worldwide. I look forward to a very interesting and productive week.

It is now my pleasure to invite my good colleague, Mr. Juan Carlos Lentijo, IAEA Deputy-Director General and Head of the Department of Nuclear Safety and Security, to deliver his opening remarks.