

OPENING STATEMENT
THE IAEA NOBEL PEACE PRIZE EVENT IN BANGKOK

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Honourable Minister of Energy, Honourable Minister of Health,
Distinguished Guests, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to greet you at the opening of this 5-day Special Event on regional cancer training. I wish to congratulate our hosts, the Office of Atoms for Peace and the Siriraj Hospital, on the occasion of the birthday of the King and wish to thank them especially for all their efforts in making this seminar possible. I also wish to extend **IAEA's** gratitude to other organizations and individuals who are participating and contributing to the programme. These include the World Health Organization (WHO) and its Regional Offices for Asia; International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC); International Union against Cancer (UICC); and the experts who will lecture this week from Argentina, Australia, Canada, India, Iran, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand; and last but not least, all the distinguished participants from across Asia.

As you may be aware, following the award of the **2005 Nobel Peace Prize** to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its Director General Dr Mohamed ElBaradei, the IAEA established the Nobel Peace Prize Cancer and Nutrition Fund. This fund, which has brought us together today, will use the IAEA's share of the Nobel Prize to provide practical training in radiation oncology and cancer control in conjunction with the implementation of the Agency's Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT).

I will have an opportunity later today to give you more details on PACT. Here I would provide a brief background summary. PACT was established in 2004 with the desire to improve our ability to combat cancer.

As you heard already, cancer is a **leading cause of death** globally and is growing fast in the developing world. Over two-thirds of all

cancer deaths occur in low and middle income countries. In Asia and the Pacific, cancer is already the leading cause of mortality in several countries. In 2005, cancer killed almost 4 million people in this region. In 2020, according to **WHO**, cancer will kill some 11 million people in the year; half of them will unfortunately be in Asia and the Pacific.

Although we agree that **cancer prevention** is likely to be the most cost-effective solution in many low-resources countries, comprehensive cancer diagnosis and treatment, especially radiotherapy, remains a vital necessity. Cancer care services must be expanded and must become accessible and affordable for all. By achieving this, many lives can be saved and the quality of life improved for all patients with cancer.

Radiotherapy is a valuable component of treatment for over 50% of cancer patients in high income countries. The need for radiotherapy is even greater in low and middle income countries, because of late stage cancers and the need for more palliative care using radiation. Of the 260 million accumulated cancer cases by 2020, there will be approximately 150 million in developing countries; **100 million** of whom will need radiation treatment. Again, more than half of these patients will be in the Asia and the Pacific region. However, with nearly 5 million new cancer cases per year and the need for nearly 4000 radiotherapy machines, only about **1200 exist** in this region. Obviously, the existing infrastructure and resources are far from sufficient to respond to the growing demand. There is a need for urgent action!

Over the last three decades, the IAEA has provided **US\$160 million** of cancer-related assistance to low and middle income countries through its technical cooperation programme. Although this assistance has enabled many countries to establish safe and effective radiotherapy capabilities to provide higher quality treatment to at least a portion of their cancer patients, we firmly believe that expanding radiotherapy access alone will not achieve maximum clinical or public health value without complementary capacity building in cancer prevention, early detection and palliation.

To achieve maximum impact, the transfer of radiotherapy technology must therefore be a part of a broader **cancer control strategy** that includes prevention, early detection, earlier diagnosis of the common cancers and access to treatment and palliative care, as well as the education and training of cancer care professionals.

The Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy, or **PACT** in short, was created within the IAEA to advance cancer treatment capacity building in a manner which is complemented by – and integrated with -- other critical elements of cancer control in order to empower nations to deal with cancer comprehensively and cost-effectively, and thereby to achieve maximal clinical and public health impact. PACT's primary goal is to enable low and middle income countries to introduce or expand existing infrastructure and capacity in radiotherapy, in a sustainable manner; and to improve or accelerate widespread access to effective radiotherapy services as an essential part of a multidisciplinary cancer care strategy.

PACT is building **partnerships** worldwide with leading cancer organizations, governmental and non-governmental, as well as the private sector. These partnerships are needed in order to have a realistic chance of raising the necessary funds to fight effectively the cancer epidemic. Through these partnerships, PACT is also seeking to develop the necessary strategies and the enabling conditions for cancer knowledge transfer and educational and training programmes. Development of regional strategies for the training of cancer care professionals is therefore central to PACT's efforts.

Experience shows that the critical bottleneck to advancing cancer care capacity, whether in treatment or prevention, is **training of staff** in all areas of cancer control. Highly trained and motivated professional staff underpin all aspects of a comprehensive cancer control programme. PACT, through its partnerships with contributing IAEA Member States and some of the leading cancer control organizations worldwide, is looking to build capacity and long term support for continuous education and training of cancer care professionals, as well as for community based civil society action to combat cancer.

In order to achieve this, **Regional Cancer Training Networks** will be developed to complement IAEA's current programmes. To date,

most IAEA-sponsored training of new radiotherapy professionals has taken place in foreign countries. Despite significant success, this involves huge expense and dislocation for the trainees. The *Regional Cancer Training Networks* are designed to accommodate trainees regionally, using modern information technology tools. These tools will help create a *Regional Virtual Cancer Control University* and mentorship programme, tapping into the experience and expertise of the major cancer control and care organisations worldwide.

This **5-day Special Event**, organised in cooperation with the Thai authorities and a number of regional and international organizations, lays the foundation for the creation of these *Regional Cancer Training Networks* in the Asia and the Pacific region. The Special Event includes modules on the following topics:

- Comprehensive cancer control
- Evidence-based radiation oncology
- Clinical research
- Education and training
- Emerging techniques in radiotherapy planning and delivery

No one knows better than those assembled here today the extent of the crisis facing humanity in the form of this terrifying disease. With your experience and expertise in cancer care, supported by WHO and other international organisations present here, and combined with the IAEA's expertise in delivering radiation medicine technology and training, I am confident that this Event will mark the beginning of a new era of regional and international cooperation for joint programme development in combating cancer.

We have a very real opportunity to **improve the lives** of large numbers of the citizens of developing countries. We can also save thousands of lives if we put together the tools, the knowledge and the political will to fight cancer effectively. The IAEA is fully committed to this endeavour. We want to see it succeed. We hope and trust that it will. Thank you for your attention.