INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

24 April 2020

Dear Ms Velshi, dear Rumina,

Thank you very much for your letter from 9th April 2020. The initiative you set out in your letter is well received and, as you know, the Secretariat very much recognises the current challenges. I also greatly welcomed the opportunity we had for further discussion on the matter during our exchange on 16th April 2020.

I fully agree with you that the Commission on Safety Standards (CSS) has an important role to play in assessing the lessons from the current COVID-19 pandemic and their potential implications for the safety standards. Similarly, there may be implications for the Nuclear Security Guidance Committee (NSGC) and the nuclear security guidance documents. Although there is no specific safety standard or nuclear security guidance publication dedicated to a pandemic or similar situation, there already exist requirements and guidance on the operation of nuclear installations, as well as for emergency preparedness and response, which include staffing in situations of crisis. But you are right that there is room for further improvement. I would welcome the CSS, and the Safety Standards Committees (SSCs) and NSGC, discussing the issue with a view to developing further dedicated additional guidance for situations, including pandemics, that could have a severe impact on the availability of staff needed at a nuclear installation. As we discussed, the Secretariat will establish a 'virtual' session of the 47th CSS meeting within the next few weeks to allow initial discussions on this issue to take place.

In fact, the Department of Nuclear Safety and Security has already begun some preliminary analysis of the safety standards and nuclear security guidance to identify the extent to which such pandemic situations are covered. The Department is also preparing a summary of the experience collected through the International Reporting System for Operating Experience (IRS) and the newly COVID-19 Operational Experience Network established by the Department of Nuclear Energy. This initial analysis can be used to feed the discussion in the CSS and could be the starting point of deeper analysis involving also the SSCs and NSGC. In addition, the Department is planning to prepare an informational publication based on experience of actions taken by Member States. Such a document can be prepared and published in a shorter time than a new or updated standard or guidance publication. This could further help to identify good and best practices and form the basis for any later additional guidance.

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Thank you too for informing me in your letter about Canada's suggestion that the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS) address their response to the COVID-19 pandemic in their national presentations and at the 8th Review Meeting. Certainly, Contracting Parties can voluntarily include in their presentations their responses to the COVID-19 crisis, and it is for the Contracting Parties as a whole to decide on what and how to report through their national presentations, as the President of the CNS has already stated. I will follow the developments at the CNS with interest, as an opportunity to further enhance nuclear safety. The Secretariat stands ready to support in this regard as needed and requested by the President of the CNS.

I look forward to working closely with you on this and further important matters over the next term of the CSS. I hope that you and your family are safe and healthy and remain so during these unusual times.

with warm regards

Yours sincerely,

Rafael Mariano Grossi