

**International Conference on access to civil nuclear energy**  
**Opening speech by Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the Republic**  
Paris, 8 March 2010

Mr Secretary-General of the OECD and dear friend,  
Mr Director General of the IAEA,

I wanted to say to you once again, how much France appreciates the clarity of your preliminary statements. It was high time. We need an honest man and a courageous man. Believe that we will support your action.

Mr President of the European Commission, with whom I so enjoy working day after day, Ministers, dear Jean-Louis Borloo, dear Bernard Kouchner, dear Christine Lagarde, Nowadays, we commonly hear that we have entered a new nuclear age, which you have called the “Renaissance” of nuclear energy.

The analogy with this glorious period of European history is bound to give rise to much debate. But there are some common features with the Renaissance, such as questioning old ways of thinking and irrational fears, and having faith in science and technology, which were features of the Renaissance.

It is up to us to turn this rediscovery of nuclear energy into an opportunity for progress and cooperation by mankind.

The history of nuclear energy has been closely intertwined with the history of contemporary France, ever since Henri Becquerel discovered radioactivity in 1896. In the 1970s France made a historic choice to create a complete nuclear energy industry for massive electricity production.

And all of the successive governments, from the left and the right, have consistently upheld this choice in favour of civil nuclear energy. France has 58 reactors. France has continued her commitment with the two third-generation EPRs that she is building. France will have 60 nuclear reactors. France is continuing her research efforts. France wants to cooperate with all countries that wish to use civil nuclear energy.

France has launched the massive ITER fusion power research project with seven partners representing some 34 countries. Construction will start in June.

France’s lead does not confer any special privileges. But it does give France a duty to share her experience with all countries wishing to start or resume civil nuclear energy programmes. It is clear, it is our policy, it is our will.

I have suggested holding a meeting of Energy Ministers in cooperation with the IAEA and the OECD. I would like this forum to be an opportunity for all of us to benefit from each other’s points of view.

Ladies and gentlemen, my dear friends,

The global population is growing in size and wealth. We will need 40% more energy by 2030. I am telling this to all the ideologues outside this room: we need to come up with 40% more energy by 2030. Ideologies advocating degrowth or inward-looking solutions offer no answer. Ideologies that advocate degrowth are selfish ideologies that want to keep the poor in poverty. That is what degrowth means: shutting those who have nothing out of progress and a better life.

The priority is the fight against climate change. I say this under the watchful eye of Jean-Louis Borloo and I wish to salute his action in this area. My predecessor said “our house is on fire”. Therefore, we must do whatever it takes to save our home, to save our planet, to comply with our objectives with regard to fighting global warming. We need nuclear energy. There is not a single serious person who could think that we can meet our objectives with renewable energy sources alone. But France is not saying: “nuclear energy is all we need”. We are

saying: “we need civil nuclear energy and we need renewable energy sources”. We need both to protect the planet and to live up to our commitments in the fight against global warming.

I would also like to add that 80% of the increase in electricity consumption between now and 2030 will come from countries that are not members of the OECD. This means that nuclear energy must take root in new countries, or else those countries will not see economic progress and will not end poverty. Let us be clear, France’s vision is of a world that will not be divided between countries with nuclear technology, jealously guarding their privileges, and nations demanding a right to nuclear know-how that the others deny them. That is not our vision. In France’s view, civil nuclear energy can be the cement of a new international solidarity, where each country will need the others to advance.

Governments will play an absolutely crucial role, since switching to nuclear energy requires a strong scientific commitment, because generations of technicians and engineers will have to be trained.

It will require a strong financial commitment for initial investment, modernization and then decommissioning.

It will require a commitment to safety and security, because we are accountable to our citizens for safety and security.

Some will say that this or that country is not up to the task. I feel that this type of prejudice stems from a disdain for others that is intolerable since there have been nuclear accidents in “northern” countries. The North does not have any lessons to teach the South. My conviction lies in the opposite direction. As long as our governments work together over time, with a shared vision, safety and security will be objectives that we can all meet.

I would now like to present to you the points that I feel are critical for a successful nuclear energy renaissance.

1/ First of all, let me address the elephant in the room, financing: I cannot understand and I cannot accept the ostracism of nuclear energy by international financing. *It is a scandal.* International financial institutions do not currently finance civil nuclear energy projects. The current situation means that countries are condemned to rely on more costly energy that causes greater pollution. What a fine result! I propose to change that by demanding that the World Bank, the EBRD and the other development banks make a firm commitment to finance clean civil nuclear energy.

Then there is another scandal surrounding the allocation of carbon credits through clean development mechanisms. *Outdated ideology means that a country developing civil nuclear energy cannot obtain carbon credits.* And yet, these credits are used to finance all other forms of decarbonized energy! Now, civil nuclear energy is completely decarbonized. So, what is the logic behind this position? There isn’t any. But what are the consequences of this situation? Rarer and more costly carbon credits, and a distortion of investment choices. *And who suffers? The poorest countries.* Therefore, I propose that carbon credits be used to finance all forms of decarbonized energy under the new global architecture after 2013 and I call on all other countries that share this position to join us. Do we or do we not want to meet the objectives for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases from carbonized energy? To meet them, we need both nuclear energy and renewable energy.

2/ My second recommendation is that we take pains to involve our citizens closely in the projects. The time when a nuclear plant, or, in my opinion, any other sensitive industrial plant, such as chemical or oil plants, could be imposed on the population with no regard for citizens’ concerns is now in the past. *Secrecy gives rise to anxiety.* Our projects have to be transparent and France says to all countries wishing to develop civil nuclear energy: “the best tool for convincing your citizens is transparency”. There can be no development of civil nuclear energy without a commitment to transparency.

3/ My third proposal is to make training a priority. It is not merely a question of training engineers and technicians to run power plants, even though this is the crux of the matter. We have to master the scientific and economic aspects, by which I mean building plants, project management and marketing electricity. We choose to be interdependent. It is in our mutual interest that nuclear energy be developed by men and women with a solid training in these fields.

France has already opened up to the world. We have increased the number of students studying nuclear energy threefold since 2007. There is, my dear friends, a huge problem with educating our elites. There is a shortage, all over the world, of engineers and technicians in the sector. We have tripled the number of students in France. This year, France's international masters programme will take students from all over the world, including Jordan, Poland, the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, China, India, Vietnam, Tunisia and Algeria. We want to share our expertise with you. There is work for everyone to do. In 2009, France's Atomic Energy Commission, which is now called the Atomic and Alternative Energy Commission, accepted more than 1,000 doctoral and post-doctoral students in its programmes, including 14% from the Maghreb.

This is a good thing. But we want to do even more and we will step up our efforts by creating an International Nuclear Energy Institute that will include an International Nuclear Energy School. It will bring together the best teachers and researchers to provide very high quality education at Saclay, where we will create the largest campus in Europe, and at Cadarache. The Institute will be an integral part of the international network of specialized Centres of Excellence now taking shape. We will set up the first Centre in Jordan. Other nuclear energy training centres backed by France will be developed, like the Franco-Chinese Nuclear Energy Institute that we are creating in cooperation with the University of Canton. Ultimately, I hope that a vast scientific network will take shape and bring together international efforts. I should add that I asked Bernard Kouchner to open up a large number of scholarships for foreign students in nuclear studies. As you can see, we need, every one of us in the world needs, to train generations of engineers and technicians. No country can manage on its own, but the country that took the lead in civil nuclear energy is willing to share its skills, its expertise and its experience with you.

4/ My fourth proposal is to make safety a collective priority. Let us be clear, nuclear energy is not innocuous. Even though all human activities carry risks: just think of the disasters and thousands of casualties caused by oil, coal, chemicals and gas! Nuclear safety is not a domestic issue, Mr Director General; it is a collective concern.

Thanks to unwavering vigilance, there has never been a significant nuclear accident in Western Europe. On the other hand, just think of the worldwide trauma caused by the accidents at Chernobyl and in the United States.

The task of supervision must be given to an independent safety authority. I do not subscribe to blindly following the precautionary principle, which usually leads to no action at all. But given the real risks, we must apply strict standards.

We still need to make progress in Europe, dear José Manuel Barroso. In June 2009, we adopted – I should say finally adopted! It is our fault – a nuclear safety Directive. The European regulators are holding a conference in Brussels in 2011 to enhance cooperation. And plans for a European safety training institute are also on the table. It could become the first in an international network of nuclear safety experts.

Each country will have to make its own choices. But to inform future decision-making, I would like to see an independent body, under the aegis of the IAEA, develop an international scoreboard based on indisputable science and technology. I am asking you, Mr Director General, to rank the reactors on the market according to the safety criterion. Because today,

the market only ranks them by price. Let the IAEA take responsibility for saying: here are the different reactors on the market and here are their safety rankings.

President Obama has invited several dozen countries to Washington next month to discuss nuclear security. The United Nations Security Council has already set out binding principles in UNSCR 1540. The more nuclear plants there are in the world, the more strictly the Security Council's decisions will have to be enforced.

5/ The fifth priority is compliance with non-proliferation. Non-proliferation is a cornerstone of international security. A fresh arms race would not be in anyone's interest. Nobody wants to have a country that cheats in its neighbourhood. I would like to stress once again just how historic Libya's voluntary decisions in 2003 were in this context. I do not share all of Libya's choices and statements, far from it. But Libya voluntarily renounced nuclear arms in 2003, and we would like other countries to do the same today. I see observers being very severe with some countries, forgetting what they have done, and being too lenient with other countries, refusing to see what they are doing.

We cannot ask for civil nuclear energy cooperation, with the long-term partnership and responsibility that it entails, and then renege on our international obligations. That is the proposal that France is putting on the table. Therefore, I propose that we suspend our nuclear cooperation with countries that do not comply with their obligations. The European Union has already decided to do so and the G8 has already proposed doing so. In my conception of law and justice, a person who cheats should not have the same rights as an honest person. France will be adamant when it comes to defending every country's right to access nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. But France will be just as adamant in her opposition to those countries that violate collective security standards. If countries comply with international law, they will be entitled to cooperation to achieve access to civil nuclear energy. If they violate it, they will not be entitled to any cooperation.

6/ The last point concerns access to nuclear fuel. Given the scale of the investment and the lifetime of the projects, some countries are legitimately worried about the risk of interruption of fuel deliveries. Fuel supply security is now ensured by long-term agreements. I believe that we must do more and establish supply safeguards within the framework of the IAEA, Mr Director General. This will be a collective commitment to have other suppliers step in in the event of an interruption of the supply. To make this commitment credible, I propose setting up a fuel bank at the IAEA that will be financed through international contributions. The plans are ready and the financing exists, since the European Union, under the French Presidency, with the consent of Mr Barroso, decided to contribute €25 million to complete the project.

If the number of reactors increases massively, the issue of building new enrichment or reprocessing/recycling plants to meet industry needs may come up. A few years ago, some countries wanted to prohibit new countries from acquiring these capacities on the grounds that they are dangerous per se. France rejects this approach. It would be an economic aberration as well as a violation of the legitimate right to develop energy for peaceful purposes.

Finally, a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty is urgently needed and the IAEA needs to be given more resources for closer scrutiny of sensitive technology.

7/ In conclusion, I would like to address the issue of spent fuel and final waste management. Given the accumulation of spent fuel, some countries rely on long-term storage of untreated waste. This is the choice of the United States, Sweden and Finland.

Other countries recycle their spent fuel. This is the choice of France, Russia and Japan. Recycling enables them to get the most value out of their uranium resources while reducing the final waste that has to be stored to a minimum. I think that this is the most promising approach for the future. That is why France will continue to cooperate with many countries by

making its reprocessing and recycling facilities available to any country that does not have them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you can see, responsible development of nuclear energy is a critical issue for the future of our planet.

We have to work together to achieve new nuclear governance based on an enhanced IAEA, and we are counting on Mr Amano for that, and for the affirmation of a collective vision.

I hope that your work, spearheaded by Jean-Louis Borloo, will lay the foundations for this.

Ladies and gentlemen, we do not have to tell the world to make a choice between progress and security or between poverty and respect for the environment. What we have, thanks to the work of researchers in the twentieth century, is substantial energy. Let us share it as well as possible and let us make the best use of it for environmental purposes, for peaceful purposes, to help your countries end poverty, and to help with the transition as fossil energy runs out, and let us do so in tandem with the development of renewable energy sources.

This is France's commitment. France is not doing this to teach anyone a lesson. France is not doing this to raise her profile or even to set an example. France is doing this because she is convinced that sharing civil nuclear energy for peaceful purposes is a decisive step towards addressing environmental concerns and towards ensuring a better global distribution of wealth.

Thank you!