EUROPEAN UNION

The President of the European Commission
H.E. Mr José Manuel Barroso

High-level meeting on Nuclear Safety and Security - Session 1

United Nations

22 September 2011

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we say nuclear, we say global. As we have learnt through tragedy over more than 25 years, radiation knows no borders.

The European Union therefore strongly welcomes this United Nations initiative for a global, comprehensive reflection on nuclear safety issues. We support tighter international rules for safe and sustainable use of nuclear energy, and we have, in our own realm, taken the lead on this.

The European Commission is already carrying out an EU-wide safety and risk assessment of nuclear facilities, together with national nuclear safety regulators.

This assessment began in June and proceeds along two tracks, with progress reports to be made public in December 2011:

- Track 1 on safety assesses how nuclear power plants can withstand disasters – be they natural or man-made. Obviously, we need a broad and rigorous approach here. These checks go beyond previous evaluations made during the licensing process.

- Track 2 on security focuses on potential security threats and the prevention and response to incidents due to malevolent or terrorist acts.

Two of the three steps in the assessment process are already complete. Namely: the operators' self-assessment and verification by national regulators.

The third stage is the peer review of the national reports, which will start in January 2012. We are open to allowing third countries to join this peer review process on the basis of reciprocity.

In the light of the results, we will then follow-up, including if need be new Europe-wide legislative proposals. Our goal is clear: we will ensure the highest safety and security standards for our citizens.

We are already enforcing two key pieces of EU legislation, the EU Safety Directive (2009) and the recently adopted Directive on Radioactive Waste (July 2011).
Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

In the interests of transparency and a stronger global safety culture, the Commission is ready to share the results of these on-going EU stress tests. Likewise we welcome sight of assessments in other countries.

Building on the clear statement by the G8 Leaders in Deauville, the European Union considers that all countries operating nuclear power plants should carry out similar assessments as soon as possible.

The EU’s neighbours (Switzerland, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Armenia, Croatia, Turkey and Belarus) have already agreed to undertake comparable safety and risk checks.

This coherent approach by our whole region sets an example for the global community, and adds to our already well-established cooperation with 15 countries under the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation.

Beyond the wider European region, we clearly need to work for global progress on nuclear safety cooperation. The IAEA can play a key role in developing a common global approach to nuclear safety.

The 5th Review Meeting of the Convention on Nuclear Safety in April 2011 showed the need to make this instrument more legally binding.

The European Union is committed to offering whatever assistance that helps to increase the effectiveness and enforceability of the Convention.

We offer our safety and risk assessment process as a starting point for such enhancements, as well as tangible support through the EU instrument of nuclear safety.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The tragedy of Fukushima has yet again demonstrated that we need a true cross-border, global approach to nuclear safety.

Japan's heartache must become the world's spur to action. In the name of all those affected by Fukushima, I commit the European Union to play its part and I urge the strongest possible common, global approach.

Thank you for your attention.