Statement

Of

The delegation of the State of Qatar

by

H.E Ambassador Yousef Bin Khalifa Al- Sada

Director of International Organizations and Conferences

Before

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General Assembly of the United Nations

on nuclear safety and security

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Mr. and Madam co-chairs

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to thank His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations for organizing this meeting on the subject of nuclear safety, because of its great importance, especially in light of the developments that occurred in recent months, and the nuclear disaster that occurred in Japan, which placed the issue high on the international agenda.

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In recent years, there have been many studies which confirmed that fossil fuels, including oil and natural gas, are one of the biggest causes of climate change and global warming. The studies concluded that nuclear power could be the alternative to mitigate these phenomena. The common denominator of this studies was the emphasis that nuclear energy is a clean energy that does not pose any significant risk to the environment, as long as there is a continuous and effective control of nuclear plants. However, this studies have neglected the serious risks that result from any damage or explosion of a nuclear reactor because of natural disasters or because of military operations, in addition to the absence of a binding international mechanism to review the compliance of states that possess nuclear technology with the international standards on nuclear safety.

Perhaps what happened in the month of March in Japan is the best proof of the danger that can be posed by nuclear power not only to human life but to the environment as well, in the medium and the long term. The devastation caused by the earthquake in Japan, which has led to serious damages in Fukushima reactor not only did it affect the normal life of the Japanese people, it also put their livelihood and their well-being at risk. Furthermore, the nuclear radiations that leaked from the Fukushima created a great concern among international public opinion, and many people started wondering about the effectiveness and efficiency of measures taken after this disaster to mitigate its brunt, in addition to safety measures in nuclear reactors and the surrounding areas.

No matter how much precautions and preparations taken for natural or man-made disasters, it is impossible to foresee all the probabilities of the occurrence of a nuclear disaster. For example, despite the precautions taken in Japan when the reactor was built to withstand the structural damage that might be caused by any earthquake, the main reason that caused the disaster of Fukushima was the overrun
of water into the nuclear reactor, causing the breakdown of the cooling system.

Mr. and Madam co-chairs

Unlike other energy resources, the danger of nuclear energy lies in the radiation that might result from the occurrence of any damage or explosion of a nuclear reactor, which may have serious environmental and health consequences not only on the country where this disaster occurred, but also on neighboring countries, the generation that experienced the disaster, as well the generations to come. That is what has led Germany to take the decision of shutting down all its reactors by 2022 and pushed Italy to ban nuclear energy for decades.

The Chernobyl disaster, which occurred in Ukraine in 1986, is the best proof of that. The serious impact of this disaster was not only limited to Ukraine; it exceeded it to many European countries. Many studies conducted during in recent years have shown that the Chernobyl reactor explosion was behind serious environmental and health consequences for scores of people of neighboring countries.

The State of Qatar is located in an area known for the presence of some countries that have nuclear reactors or others in the process of constructing them, whether for peaceful purposes or for purposes of acquiring nuclear weapons. The State of Qatar has always been among the countries that emphasize the inviolability of the inalienable rights of states to access nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, and that no obstacles be put in front of non-nuclear states in their quest to develop nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes.

However, in light of the Fukushima disaster, and the long-term serious consequences caused, we stress again the importance of activating and implementing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and turn the Middle East into a zone free of nuclear weapons. Yet, knowing that this aim remains elusive in light of Israel's continued building of nuclear weapons and construction of other reactors and the pursuit of other countries in the region to have nuclear energy, our main concern is the need for the international community to think of a formula to avert environmental disaster, as the one that occurred in Japan or in Chernobyl.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In light of the foregoing, nuclear safety standards issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency should be reviewed and strengthened to make sure they are implemented at the international level, especially since these standards aim to protect people and the environment from the harmful effects of nuclear radiation.
that may result from natural disasters. Not only should these standards be reviewed, but they must be implemented to ensure that they are respected by all countries in which there are nuclear reactors. As long as there is no explicit commitment from states that possess nuclear technology to abide by this standards, the latter may be prove irrelevant. Therefore, there is a need to systematically and regularly review the safety of all nuclear power plants.

In this context, this review should not be limited to countries that possess nuclear technology; nuclear reactors should also be subjected to periodic review by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which would lend more credibility and transparency to the review process and make it more effective.

However, we cannot but express our disappointment after the meeting of the Board of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) held between 12 and 16 September, which adopted a UN Plan of Action that only encouraged States possessing nuclear technology to receive international missions to review the safety standards of nuclear reactors and made the review process a voluntary one, rather than establishing a binding international standards that would obligate these countries to subject their nuclear facilities to a periodic review by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Thank you for your attention.