



JAMES MARTIN CENTER FOR  
NONPROLIFERATION STUDIES

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Vienna Center for Disarmament  
and Non-Proliferation

FACT SHEET #1

*Information Relevant to the IAEA General Conference*

# Topic: IAEA General Conference

## Overview & Issues for the 2012 Meeting

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### WHAT IS THE IAEA GENERAL CONFERENCE? WHAT DOES IT DO?

The General Conference (GC) is one of the main policy making bodies of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). It consists of all IAEA member states and convenes annually, usually for one week in September. Representatives of member states, often at the ministerial level, deliver statements at the General Debate, reporting on their countries' nuclear activities, plans, and cooperation with the IAEA, and outlining national positions on issues ranging from nuclear nonproliferation and verification to nuclear applications in medicine and agriculture.

The General Conference considers the Agency's annual activity reports, approves the IAEA's biennial budget, and adopts resolutions on subjects such as safeguards implementation, nuclear security, power and non-power nuclear applications, and other matters relevant to the IAEA activities. Most of the resolutions are negotiated at the Committee of the Whole, an important body of the GC that works in parallel with the General Debate. The Committee often designates additional working groups to develop the text of particularly difficult and contentious resolutions.

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### WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ISSUES THAT WILL BE ADDRESSED AT THIS YEAR'S GENERAL CONFERENCE?

**Middle East:** In past years, the GC has witnessed controversy surrounding the Arab-sponsored resolution on Israeli Nuclear Capabilities (INC), calling on Israel to join the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and place all its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. In 2011, however, the Arab states refrained from tabling this resolution. It appears that the Arab states will not move forward with the resolution in 2012, although they have requested that the issue be placed on the GC agenda. Surprisingly, Russia has circulated draft text of a new resolution in support of the planned 2012 Middle East Conference. The GC will also consider the traditional, Egypt-sponsored, resolution on the Application of IAEA Safeguards in the Middle East. The latter resolution has not been adopted by consensus since 2006, with Israel, the United States, and sometimes EU states abstaining. For more details, please see *Fact Sheet 2* on Middle East issues.



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**Safeguards Implementation:** Traditionally, the General Conference adopts an EU-sponsored resolution concerning the application of IAEA Safeguards and Model Additional Protocol. (See below on regional groupings, particularly the EU.) The disagreement over the resolution's text in recent years often centered on the question of whether the Additional Protocol, a voluntary measure which provides the agency with additional tools to detect undeclared nuclear activities, should be considered the verification standard for non-nuclear-weapon states party to the NPT. Other points of contention include the more recent "state-level" approach to safeguards (which emphasizes broader, comprehensive information about a state's nuclear program beyond traditional inspections and declarations) and the IAEA's potential involvement in nuclear disarmament verification. In 2011, disagreements on this issue ran so deep that for the first time in years the delegates were unable to agree on the text of the safeguards resolution.

**Nuclear Security:** This year marks the tenth anniversary of enhanced Agency activities related to improving nuclear security. In March 2012, following the request of the General Conference the IAEA Board approved the appointment of a Nuclear Security Guidance Committee (NSGC) as a standing body of senior experts in the area of nuclear security open to all Member States. The Agency is also preparing for the "IAEA International Conference on Nuclear Security: Enhancing Global Efforts," scheduled to take place in July 2013. The IAEA's Nuclear Security Plan for 2010-2013, third of its kind, is currently under implementation, and the Director General has submitted his 2012 Nuclear Security Report for the review of the IAEA Board and General Conference. For more details, please see *Fact Sheet #3* on nuclear security.

**Nuclear Safety:** The March 2011 catastrophe at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant led to increased attention to nuclear safety and IAEA's role in this regard. The GC adopted the IAEA Action Plan on Nuclear Safety in September 2011. This year, member states will review Director General Yukiya Amano's first report on the progress of implementation of the Action Plan. Japan also announced earlier this year that in December it will co-host a ministerial conference on nuclear safety with the IAEA in the Fukushima prefecture. For more details, please see *Fact Sheet #4* on nuclear safety.

**New Board of Governors Members:** The IAEA Statute, agreed to in 1957, established eight regional groups for the purposes of elections to the Board of Governors: North America, Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, Middle East and South Asia, South East Asia and the Pacific, and Far East. Each year, the General Conference elects 11 members to serve staggered two year terms on the Board of Governors—the members elected this year will therefore serve until 2014. It is currently expected that this year the GC will elect Argentina, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Greece, Norway, Poland, Algeria, Libya, Pakistan, Thailand, and Nigeria.

In addition, the current Board has designated 13 Member States to serve for one year. These "designated" board members are: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Board members whose terms are ending in September 2012 are Chile, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Jordan, Niger, Portugal, Singapore, Tunisia, and United Arab Emirates. Brazil's and Belgium's terms were also due to end, but both countries were designated to remain on the Board.

**New issues:** Any member state can propose an inclusion of an additional item in the GC agenda. In August, Iran sent a [letter](#) to the IAEA Director General requesting that the GC consider an item titled "Promotion of Efficiency and Effectiveness of the IAEA Decision Making Process." Iran has been locked in a dispute with the IAEA over its nuclear program and, most recently, over the Agency's access to a site in Parchin, where it is suggested Iran has conducted activities relevant to developing nuclear weapons. In explaining its request, Iran referred to "unbalanced and inequitable" representation of member states on the Board of Governors,



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failure to expand the Board membership since the last decision to do so in 1999, and the need to “restructure” the Board and its mandate, presumably to give more power to the General Conference. Iran is planning to propose a draft resolution on the subject, but changing the composition and mandate of the Board would require an amendment of IAEA Statute. It is very unlikely that Iran will get enough support for such a move. In 1999, the GC already voted to expand the Board membership, but the amendment has yet to enter into force. Still, the issue is likely to be contentious.

**Budget Issues:** IAEA budget is adopted biannually, and the current budget was adopted in 2011. However, the IAEA secretariat is required to issue a budget update for each year. The Budget Update for 2013 indicates that the Agency needed to make adjustments to ensure implementation of activities under the Action Plan on Nuclear Safety. The overall budget, however, as well as proportions of it allocated to major programs, remained the same. For more details, please see *Fact Sheet #5* on budget issues.

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## WHO ARE THE MAIN ACTORS? WHAT ARE POLITICAL & REGIONAL GROUPINGS? HOW DO THEY INTERACT?

Given today’s geopolitical realities, states do not necessarily keep to the regional group arrangements put forth in the IAEA Statute, and political alignments cut across various regions.

A large and important political grouping that has in recent years increasingly been involved in issues related to the IAEA matters is the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**. The NAM currently has 120 members and 17 observers, all of whom identify themselves as developing countries. The NAM Vienna Chapter was established in 2003, and it is presided over by the current NAM Chair. The Movement’s focus at the IAEA is more political than that of the **Group of 77 (G77)**, whose membership greatly overlaps with that of NAM. The latter has addressed the Board of Governors on the subjects of safeguards implementation and compliance, particularly in relation to Iran and Syria, multilateral nuclear fuel arrangements (assurances of supply), and other issues. At the General Conference, the NAM in recent years has supported the Arab states’ initiative to return the question of INC to the Conference’s agenda. The Movement has not been as united, however, in endorsing the actual text of the resolution, with several states abstaining. This is indicative of the Movement’s diversity and variety of positions among its members and observers. On highly political and controversial issues, the NAM may not be as powerful a voting bloc as the membership numbers suggest.

NAM will be particularly interesting to observe this year, as the General Conference comes soon after the Movement’s Summit of Heads of State or Government, held in Tehran in late August 2012. Iran is the new NAM Chair and has already been active in advance of the Conference. Reports from Vienna indicate that Iran has sought to chair the Committee of the Whole – a position of leadership that might have given it additional control over the negotiation of various resolutions, but also undermined the U.S. and other states’ effort to isolate Iran due to questions about its nuclear program. It appears, however, that Saudi Arabia has stepped in with its candidacy and will likely be selected to chair the Committee of the Whole. As mentioned above,



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Iran has also proposed an inclusion of a new, potentially contentious, item on the GC agenda, though it is unclear how much support for this move it has secured among NAM members.

One of the largest political groupings at the IAEA, the G77 was initially formed by 77 developing states; the group currently includes 132 countries. At the IAEA, the G77 Vienna chapter is active primarily in pushing for technical assistance and cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The Group's mission is to represent and defend the interests of developing nations. G77 representatives often argue that the assistance and cooperation activities of the IAEA should be given the same priority as verification and safeguards, and be funded from obligatory, rather than voluntary, contributions. Donor states object to such proposals, and debates between the two groups take place over the consideration of Budget Appropriations and Technical Cooperation Fund resolutions.

The group that in recent years has emerged as very disciplined and consistent in its voting is the **European Union** and "associated" states. Many countries from the Eastern European Group are now EU members, and several more are aspiring to accede, which leads them to support EU positions. Other non-EU Western European states join this bloc, as well as non-European developed states such as Australia, Canada, Japan, and the United States, especially on the issues of safeguards and verification. Together, they are known as the Western European and Other States Group (WEOG). EU traditionally sponsors a resolution entitled "Strengthening the effectiveness and improving the efficiency of the safeguards system and application of the Model Additional Protocol." The voluntary Additional Protocol compliments regular safeguards agreements and provides the IAEA with additional verification tools, such as expanded state declarations, environmental sampling and other measures. It allows the Agency to verify not only the non-diversion to weapons purposes of declared nuclear material, but also the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in a state. The EU and other developed states contend that the Additional Protocol should be an obligatory measure for all non-nuclear weapon states party to the NPT, while some of the leading NAM and G77 states, such as Egypt and Brazil, oppose this proposal. The text of the adopted resolution, therefore, usually recognizes the Additional Protocol as an important measure but stops short of endorsing it as a verification standard for all non-nuclear-weapon states. The resolution for many years had been adopted by consensus, but since 2007, due to disagreements between Western states and NAM, particularly the Arab states, it has been put to a vote several times. In 2011, General Conference failed to adopt the resolution altogether.

On budget matters, there is greater diversity of opinions within the EU and other developed states, particularly on the subject of increasing the regular IAEA budget. The major contributing states to the IAEA (and the UN more broadly) are known as the **Geneva Group** of 14 countries: Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. For more than two decades, this group insisted on "zero real growth" in the IAEA budget, but more recently, countries such as the United States and the Netherlands have supported small increases in the budget, especially in light of growing safeguards implementation needs.

**Arab states** in the IAEA also act as a group at the General Conference, particularly on issues related to the Middle East. Every year since 2006, this group has requested that the Israeli Nuclear Capabilities item be returned to the General Conference agenda and jointly sponsored a resolution under the same title. The resolution has become a source of major controversy, with many states viewing it as politically motivated and covering issues outside the purview of the Agency. The re-introduction of the INC resolution had also lead to a breakdown of consensus on the Egypt-sponsored resolution "Application of IAEA Safeguards in the Middle East." In 2011, citing goodwill and desire not to thwart preparations for the 2012 Middle East



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Conference, Arab states decided not to table the INC resolution. It appears that the group will not propose the draft resolution in 2012 for the same reasons, although it did request that the item be put on the GC agenda.

The president of the General Conference this year is a representative of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean states, Ambassador Carlos Barros of Uruguay.

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