IAEA opens Yukiya Amano Laboratories

A ceremony was held today to mark the official opening of a state-of-the-art laboratory building, named after former International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Yukiya Amano, at the agency’s Seibersdorf site outside Vienna, Austria. The new facility will increase the IAEA’s capacity to assist countries in fighting and preventing transboundary animal and zoonotic diseases like COVID-19, and to tackle challenges related to climate change and food safety.

The new three-storey Yukiya Amano Laboratories building — constructed at a cost of EUR19.2 million (USD21.7 million) — will house three of the five laboratories run jointly by the IAEA and the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO): the Animal Production and Health Laboratory, the Food and Environmental Protection Laboratory and the Soil and Water Management and Crop Nutrition Laboratory. They will have twice the space in the new facility than they currently have at Seibersdorf. The purpose-built infrastructure will house cutting-edge equipment, including mass spectrometers and next-generation gene sequencing platforms, and enhance the IAEA’s capacity for collaborative research and for the provision of training opportunities to scientists in its Member States.

Amano served as IAEA Director General from December 2009 until his death in July 2019. Last September, the IAEA General Conference unanimously adopted a resolution to name the new IAEA facility after him.

The opening ceremony was attended by Amano’s successor, Rafael Mariano Grossi, and Austrian Federal Minister for European and International Affairs Alexander Schallenberg. Other guests...
included Japanese Ambassador Takeshi Hikihara, as well as German Ambassador Gerhard Küntzle and South African Ambassador Rapulane Molekane, the two co-chairs of a group of Member States supporting the major IAEA laboratory modernisation project under which the Yukiya Amano Laboratories were built.

Opening the new laboratories, Grossi said naming the new facility was a fitting tribute “in honour of the man who did more than anyone else” to make the modernisation of the IAEA nuclear applications laboratories a reality under the Renovation of the Nuclear Applications Laboratories (ReNuAL) initiative, formally established in January 2014. He added that the opening of the facility was especially relevant in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

“The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the threat that zoonotic diseases pose to human health and well-being. It has also underscored the importance of the IAEA nuclear applications laboratories in helping our Member States.”

COVID-19 assistance

The IAEA announced yesterday it has so far delivered more than 250 consignments to 80 countries with supplies to help fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, with many more to be shipped in the coming days and weeks. The IAEA assistance includes equipment and expertise to help laboratories around the world step up testing as part of efforts to curb the spread of the disease. Some 49 countries have received real-time reverse transcription–polymerase chain reaction (real-time RT-PCR) machines.

“One hundred and twenty countries turned to us for help. We mounted the biggest operation of assistance in the history of the IAEA,” said Grossi. “This is emergency assistance and the effort is going to continue. I am encouraging countries and entities in a position to do so to contribute in this
endeavour.”

The IAEA COVID-19 assistance effort has drawn around EUR26 million in extrabudgetary funds, including support from IAEA Member States and Japan’s Takeda Pharmaceutical Company Limited. The equipment procured under the project is being shipped to all countries that requested assistance.

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