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### Combating Cancer in Africa

#### Director General Amano Visits Cancer Care Facilities in Nigeria

Staff Report

15 December 2009

Continuing his visit in Nigeria - his first official trip to a Member State - Director General Amano kicked off his initiative to focus global attention on improving cancer care in developing countries. At a press briefing following his meeting with Nigerian Vice-President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, on Monday, 14 December, Mr. Amano stated that he is visiting Nigeria because of its importance within Africa, and due the close cooperation that the IAEA enjoys with Nigeria.

"Vice-President Jonathan and I discussed cancer therapies," he said. " This is very important and I am sure this intense cooperation will continue."

He mentioned that the talks yielded an agreement between the Nigerian Government and the IAEA to intensify their joint commitment to training in cancer care, including the development of a "virtual university" to train cancer professionals.

On Tuesday, 15 December, the Director General visited the International Cancer Centre and the National Hospital in Abuja. The International Cancer Centre is key to Nigeria's initiatives to improve cancer research, diagnosis, and treatment. The Centre will be working closely with the IAEA's [Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy \(PACT\)](#) to advance comprehensive cancer control in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa and to combat the growing cancer epidemic.

Mr. Amano's visit also concentrates on technical cooperation, particularly transferring knowledge in the peaceful uses of nuclear technologies. His tour will include briefings at the Nuclear Technology Centre in the Sheda Science and Technology Complex, which conducts research and development in nuclear science and technology, such as the gamma irradiation plant that is used in food preservation, pest control, and health care delivery.

#### Background

The global cancer epidemic kills more victims annually than HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined. The majority of the global cancer burden is found in low-income and lower-middle income countries. In the past year, 7.6 million lives were lost, a death toll equivalent to an Asian tsunami every ten days. Forty percent of all cancers are preventable, yet only five percent of global resources for cancer are spent in the developing world. If cancer prevention and care services are not expanded, it is estimated that by 2050, the lifetime risk of cancer in Africa will increase by 50% to 60%, doubling the annual number of cases to 2.2 million.



IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said he will "pay special attention to cancer control" during his first year in office. (Photo: D. Calma/IAEA)

#### Story Resources

- [Nigeria and IAEA-PACT Join to Fight Cancer](#), 19 September 2009
- [In Focus: Cancer Care and Control](#)
- [Programme Action for Cancer Therapy \(PACT\)](#)
- [Technical Cooperation Division for Africa](#)
- [Division of Human Health](#)
- [Nigeria, Federal Republic of](#)
- [International Cancer Centre Abuja \(ICCA\)](#)

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Radiotherapy is one of the most frequently used anticancer therapies but is available to only 5% of the African population. The IAEA estimates that at least 55% of all cancers in Africa could respond to radiotherapy. The Agency is working to improve access to radiotherapy in Africa. In Nigeria, the Agency's technical cooperation projects have helped to establish and upgrade radiotherapy and oncology centres, expand technical capabilities in nuclear medicine diagnosis, establish a national training programme for radiotherapy technicians and conduct programmes to improve the quality of cancer patient care. As a result, there has been a 30% increase in the number of units over the past decade, with further units planned.

Mr. Amano has stated that he plans to "appeal for focussed global attention on the cancer epidemic at the *World Economic Forum* taking place in Davos from 27-31 January 2010.

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